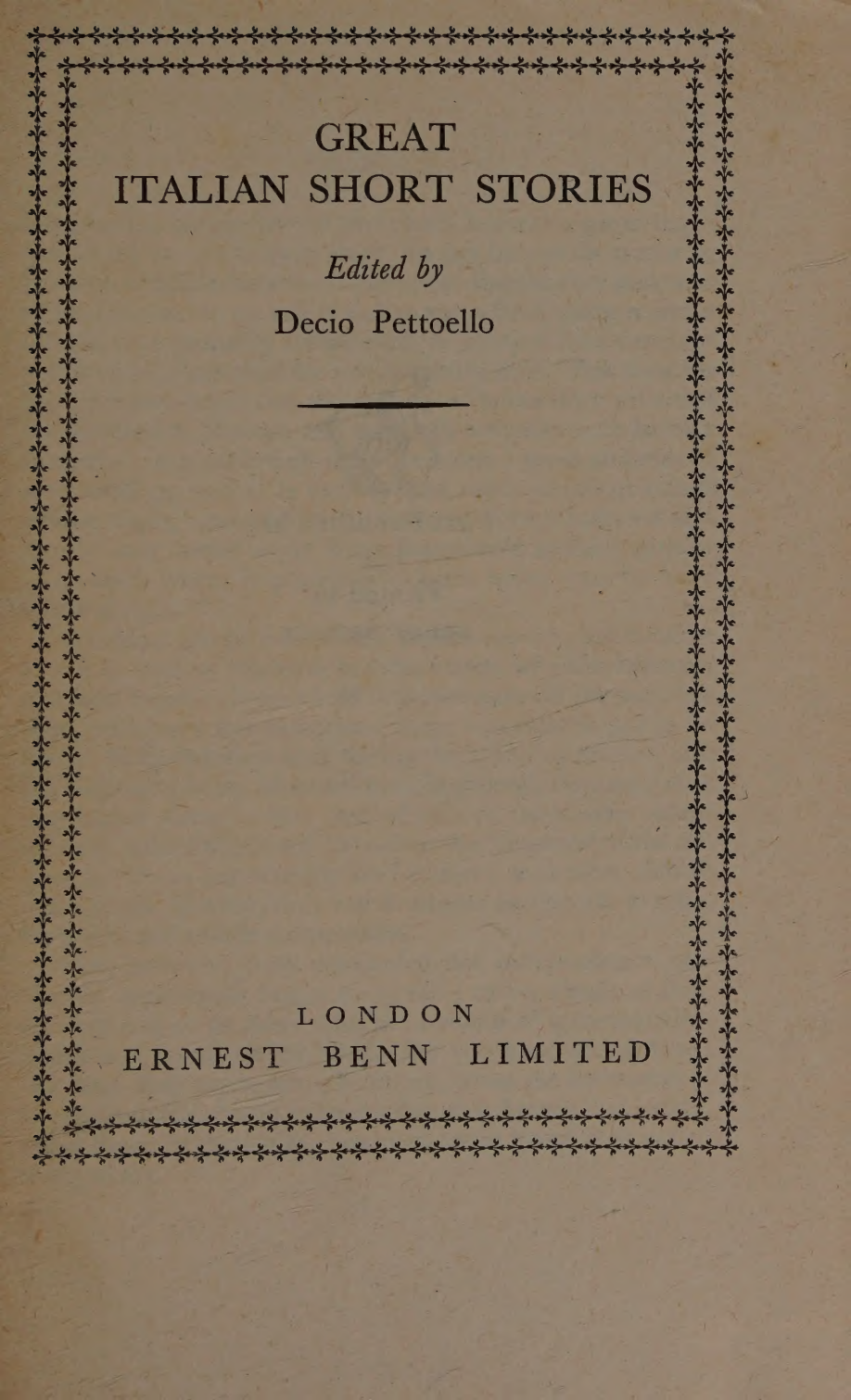


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GREAT ITALIAN SHORT STORIES

A decorative border of small, repeating floral motifs surrounds the entire text area of the book cover.

GREAT ITALIAN SHORT STORIES

Edited by
Decio Pettoello

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PREFACE

BOCCACCIO created—as everybody knows—a great tradition in the art of the short story : in fact he was *the* master in this kind of fiction for several centuries. But the very greatness of his Decameron caused it to become a fixed pattern and a fashion that probably contributed to hamper freer developments of our short story for a considerable time. This does not by any means imply that the numerous Italian story writers of the fourteenth, fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were lacking in genius : but, although they produced a great quantity of such writings, and it is easy to find many excellent things among them, nevertheless they almost always imitated and hardly ever broke away from Boccaccio's method or subjects—even where it would have been better not to have followed them.

The copious production of the sixteenth century, just because it was so copious explains, to some extent, why this *boccaccian* tradition began to lose its hold in the seventeenth century; but then, with very few exceptions, there was little to put in its place. As for the short story during the following century and the beginning of the nineteenth, if, in general, the moral tone was higher (save in the case of two or three very coarse writers), artistically it fell far below the 'elegance' of the *cinquecento*. It was a moralising kind of story, somewhat akin to those in the *Spectator*, only much weaker and poorer in style, invention and artistic construction.

When, however, Italy conquered her independence new literary movements began to spread : rather slowly at first, for they had to do away with the remains of a romanticism which had borne, on the whole, not very good artistic fruit ; but later they made more headway, when the literatures of foreign countries began to have a deeper influence—or, rather, when these, in their turn, produced more living and varied forms of art.

Thus enriched by the crossing of numerous currents of thought and technique, the Italian writers let these new elements react on the old native ones, and so succeeded in re-modelling our short story. Its Italian peculiarities are nevertheless preserved : both the writers and the characters they create are no longer merely *boccaccian*, but possess rich and subtle tones of humour, delicate sensibility and remarkable poetic gifts.

The readers of the present collection will, I hope, have an opportunity of appreciating this.

The field of Italian short stories being so great, I had to omit not a few authors that I would have included if space and a sense of proportion had allowed me to do so. Even as it is, however, I think this collection may claim to be fairly representative both of the historic development of the Italian short story and of its artistic and psychological range.

With but one exception—that of Manzoni, which has a special literary importance—all these *novelle* have been taken exclusively from volumes of short stories written as such : I discarded episodes from novels so as to avoid the useless and arbitrary complication of selecting from works of a different literary structure.

More than two-thirds of the contents of the present volume are quite modern stories, and almost all the latter are now being presented to the English reader for the first time. This fact is a proof, by the way, that Italian literature is not much cultivated in this country. I should, therefore, feel wholly satisfied with my painstaking work as editor, if this book could contribute to foster—or rather, renew—an interest in Italian literature among the English speaking public.

DECIO PETTOELLO.

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Messrs. J. M. Dent, London, publishers of the copyright translation of *The Decameron* by Mr. J. M. Rigg (Everyman Library, 1930, 2 vols.), from which our six stories of Boccaccio are taken; also publishers of the copyright translation of Sacchetti's *Tales* by M. G. Steegman (1908), from which we have taken two stories.

The following stories, taken from books formerly published by Messrs. Fratelli Treves, Milano, are now being issued by other publishers: "The Mark of Love" from G. Verga's *Vagabondaggio*; "Don Candeloro & Co." from G. Verga's *Don Candeloro e C.*; "The White Fly," from A. Varaldo's *Le Avventure*; "The Day Off" from R. Fucini's *Le Veglie di Neri*. "Cincinnatus," from D'Annunzio's *Terra Vergine*, originally published by Sommaruga, Roma, and subsequently issued by various publishers.

Also to the translators of all the modern stories of this anthology.

D. P.

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GREAT ITALIAN SHORT STORIES



FROM THE "NOVELLINO"
(XIIIth Century)



DANGEROUS TREASURE

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

A HERMIT one day proceeding on his way through a forest, chanced to discover a large cave, nearly hidden under ground. Being fatigued, he entered to repose himself awhile, and observing something shine brightly, he found it was a heap of gold. At the sight of the glittering bait, he turned away, and hastening through the forest again, as fast as possible, he met three fierce robbers, always on the watch to despoil the travellers who might pass that way. But, though inmates of the forest, they had never yet discovered the treasure from which the hermit now fled. The thieves on first perceiving him thus strangely flying, without any one in pursuit, were seized with a sort of unaccountable dread, though, at the same time, they ventured forward to ascertain the cause. On approaching to inquire, the hermit, without relaxing his pace, answered, "I flee from death, who is urging me sorely behind." The robbers, unable to perceive any one, cried out, "Shew us where he is, or take us to the place instantly." The hermit therefore replied, in a hurried voice, "Follow me then," and proceeded towards the grotto. He there pointed

out to them the fatal place, beseeching them, at the same time, to abstain from even looking at it, as they had far better do as he had done, and avoid it. But the thieves, resolving to know what strange thing it was which had alarmed him, only bade him lead the way : which, being in terror of his life, the hermit quickly did ; and shewing them the heap of gold, "Here," he said, "is the death which was in pursuit of me ;" and the thieves, suddenly seizing upon the treasure, began to rejoice exceedingly.

They afterwards permitted the good man to proceed upon his way, amusing themselves when he was gone with ridiculing his absurd conduct. The three robbers guarding the gold in their possession, began to consider in what way they should employ it. One of them observed, "Since heaven has bestowed such good fortune upon us, we ought by no means to leave the place for a moment without bearing the whole of it along with us." "No," replied another, "it appears to me we had better not do so ; but let one of us take a small portion, and set out to buy wine and viands at the city, besides many other things he may think we are in want of ;" and to this the other two consented.

Now the great demon, who is very ingenious and busy on these occasions to effect as much mischief as possible, directly began to deal with the one fixed upon to furnish provisions from the city. "As soon," whispered the devil to him, "as I shall have reached the city, I will eat and drink of the best of every thing, as much as I please, and then purchase what I want. Afterwards I will mix with the food I intend for my companions something which I trust will settle their account ; thus becoming sole master of the whole of the treasure, which will make me the richest man in this part of the world." And as he purposed to do, so he did.

He carried the poisoned food to his companions, who on their part, while he had been away, had come to the conclusion of killing him on his return, in order that they might divide the booty between themselves, saying, "Let us fall upon him the moment he comes, and afterwards eat what he has brought,

and divide the money between us in much larger shares than before."

The robber who had been at the city now returned with the articles he had bought, when the other two instantly pierced his body with their lances, and despatched him with their knives. They then began to feast upon the provisions prepared for them, and upon satiating their appetite, both soon after fell dead upon the ground. In this manner all three fell victims to each other's avarice and cruelty, without obtaining their ill-gotten wealth ; a striking proof of the judgment of Heaven upon traitors ; for, attempting to compass the death of others, they justly incurred their own. The poor hermit thus wisely fled from the gold, which remained without a single claimant.



GIOVANNI BOCCACCIO

(1313-1375)



(I)

FRIAR CIPOLLA & ST. LAWRENCE'S COALS

(Translated by J. M. RIGG)

CERTALDO, as perchance you may have heard, is a town of Val d'Elsa within our country-side, which, small though it is, had in it aforetime people of rank and wealth. Thither, for that there he found good pasture, 'twas long the wont of one of the Friars of St. Antony to resort once every year, to collect the alms that fools gave them. Fra Cipolla¹—so hight the friar—met with a hearty welcome, no less, perchance, by reason of his name that for other cause, the onions produced in that district being famous throughout Tuscany. He was little of person, red-haired, jolly-visaged, and the very best of good fellows; and therewithal, though learning he had none, he was so excellent and ready a speaker that whoso knew him not would not only have esteemed him a great rhetorician, but would have pronounced him Tully himself or, perchance, Quintilian; and in all the country-side there was scarce a soul to whom he was not either gossip or friend or lover.

Being thus wont from time to time to visit Certaldo, the friar came there once upon a time in the month of August, and on a Sunday morning, all the good folk of the neighbouring farms being come to mass in the parish church, he took occasion to come forward and say:—"Ladies and gentlemen, you wot 'tis your custom to send year by year to the poor of Baron

¹Onion.

Master St. Antony somewhat of your wheat and oats, more or less, according to the ability and the devoutness of each, that blessed St. Antony may save your oxen and asses and pigs and sheep from harm ; and you are also accustomed, and especially those whose names are on the books of our confraternity, to pay your trifling annual dues. To collect which offerings, I am hither sent by my superior, to wit, Master Abbot ; wherefore, with the blessing of God, after none, when you hear the bells ring, you will come out of the church to the place where in the usual way I shall deliver you my sermon, and you will kiss the cross ; and therewithal, knowing, as I do, that you are one and all most devoted to Baron Master St. Antony, I will by way of especial grace shew you a most holy and goodly relic, which I brought myself from the Holy Land overseas, which is none other than one of the feathers of the Angel Gabriel, which he left behind him in the room of the Virgin Mary, when he came to make her the annunciation in Nazareth." And having said thus much, he ceased, and went on with the mass.

Now among the many that were in the church, while Fra Cipolla made this speech, were two very wily young wags, the one Giovanni del Bragoniera by name, the other Biagio Pizzini ; who, albeit they were on the best of terms with Fra Cipolla and much in his company, had a sly laugh together over the relic, and resolved to make game of him and his feather. So, having learned that Fra Cipolla was to breakfast that morning in the town with one of his friends, as soon as they knew that he was at table, down they hied them into the street, and to the inn where the friar lodged, having plotted that Biagio should keep the friar's servant in play, while Giovanni made search among the friar's goods and chattels for this feather, whatever it might be, to carry it off, that they might see how the friar would afterwards explain the matter to the people. Now Fra Cipolla had for servant one Guccio, whom some called by way of addition Balena,¹ others Imbratta,² others again Porco,³ and who was such a

¹Whale.²Filth.³Hog.

rascallion that sure it is that Lippo Topo himself never painted his like. Concerning whom Fra Cipolla would oftentimes make merry with his familiars, saying :—"My servant has nine qualities, any one of which in Solomon, Aristotle, or Seneca, would have been enough to spoil all their virtue, wisdom and holiness. Consider, then, what sort of a man he must be that has these nine qualities, and yet never a spark of either virtue or wisdom or holiness." And being asked upon divers occasions what these nine qualities might be, he strung them together in rhyme, and answered :—"I will tell you. Lazy and uncleanly and a liar he is, Negligent, disobedient and foul-mouthed, iwis, And reckless and witless and mannerless ; and therewithal he has some other petty vices, which 'twere best to pass over. And the most amusing thing about him is, that, wherever he goes, he is for taking a wife and renting a house, and on the strength of a big, black, greasy beard he deems himself so very handsome a fellow and seductive, that he takes all the women that see him to be in love with him, and, if he were left alone, he would slip his girdle and run after them all. True it is that he is of great use to me, for that, be any minded to speak with me never so secretly, he must still have his share of the audience ; and, if perchance aught is demanded of me, such is his fear lest I should be at a loss what answer to make, that he presently replies, ay or no, as he deems meet."

Now, when he left this knave at the inn, Fra Cipolla had strictly enjoined him on no account to suffer any one to touch aught of his, and least of all his wallet, because it contained the holy things. But Guccio Imbratta, who was fonder of the kitchen than any nightingale of the green boughs, and most particularly if he espied there a maid, and in the host's kitchen had caught sight of a coarse fat woman, short and misshapen, with a pair of breasts that shewed as two buckets of muck and a face that might have belonged to one of the Baronci, all reeking with sweat and grease and smoke, left Fra Cipolla's room and all his things to take care of themselves, and like a vulture swooping down upon the carrion, was in the kitchen

in a trice. Where, though 'twas August, he sat him down by the fire, and fell a-gossiping with Nuta—such was the maid's name—and told her that he was a gentleman by procuration, and had more florins than could be reckoned, besides those that he had to give away, which were rather more than less, and that he could do and say such things as never were or might be seen or heard forever, good Lord ! and a day. And all heedless of his cowl, which had as much grease upon it as would have furnished forth the caldron of Altopascio,¹ and of his rent and patched doublet, inlaid with filth about the neck and under the armpits, and so stained that it shewed hues more various than ever did silk from Tartary or the Indies, and of his shoes that were all to pieces, and of his hose that were all in tatters, he told her in a tone that would have become the *Sieur de Chatillon*, that he was minded to rehabit her and put her in trim, and raise her from her abject condition, and place her where, though she would not have much to call her own, at any rate she would have hope of better things, with much more to the like effect ; which professions, though made with every appearance of good will, proved, like most of his schemes, insubstantial as air, and came to nothing.

Finding Guccio Porco thus occupied with Nuta, the two young men gleefully accounted their work half done, and, none gainsaying them, entered Fra Cipolla's room, which was open, and lit at once upon the wallet, in which was the feather. The wallet opened, they found, wrapt up in many folds of taffeta, a little casket, on opening which they discovered one of the tail-feathers of a parrot, which they deemed must be that which the friar had promised to shew the good folk of Certaldo. And in sooth he might well have so imposed upon them, for in those days the luxuries of Egypt had scarce been introduced into Tuscany, though they have since been brought over in prodigious abundance, to the grave hurt of all Italy. And though some conversance with them there was, yet in those parts folk knew next to nothing of them ; but, ad-

¹An abbey near Lucca famous for its doles of broth.

hering to the honest, simple ways of their forefathers, had not seen, nay for the most part had not so much as heard tell of, a parrot.

So the young men, having found the feather, took it out with great glee ; and looking around for something to replace it, they espied in a corner of the room some pieces of coal, where-with they filled the casket ; which they then closed, and having set the room in order exactly as they had found it, they quitted it unperceived, and hied them merrily off with the feather, and posted themselves where they might hear what Fra Cipolla would say when he found the coals in its stead. Mass said, the simple folk that were in the church went home with the tidings that the feather of the Angel Gabriel was to be seen after none ; and this goodman telling his neighbour, and that goodwife her gossip, by the time every one had breakfasted, the town could scarce hold the multitude of men and women that flocked thither all agog to see this feather.

Fra Cipolla, having made a hearty breakfast and had a little nap, got up shortly after none, and marking the great concourse of country-folk that were come to see the feather, sent word to Guccio Imbratta to go up there with the bells, and bring with him the wallet. Guccio, though 'twas with difficulty that he tore himself away from the kitchen and Nuta, hied him up with the things required ; and though, when he got up, he was winded, for he was corpulent with drinking nought but water, he did Fra Cipolla's bidding by going to the church door and ringing the bells amain.

When all the people were gathered about the door, Fra Cipolla, all unwitting that aught of his was missing, began his sermon, and after much said in glorification of himself, caused the confiteor to be recited with great solemnity, and two torches to be lit by way of preliminary to the shewing of the feather of the Angel Gabriel : he then bared his head, carefully unfolded the taffeta, and took out the casket, which, after a few prefatory words in praise and laudation of the Angel Gabriel, and his relic, he opened.

When he saw that it contained nought but coals, he did not

suspect Guccio Balena of playing the trick, for he knew that he was not clever enough, nor did he curse him, that his carelessness had allowed another to play it, but he only imprecated himself, that he had committed his things to the keeping of one whom he knew to be "negligent and disobedient, reckless and witless." Nevertheless, he changed not colour, but with face and hands upturned to heaven, he said in a voice that all might hear :—"O God, blessed be Thy might for ever and ever." Then, closing the casket, and turning to the people :—"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, "you are to know, that when I was yet a very young man, I was sent by my superior into those parts where the sun rises, and I was expressly bidden to search until I should find the Privileges of Porcellana, which, though they cost nothing to seal, are of much more use to others than to us. On which errand I set forth, taking my departure from Venice and traversing the Borgo de' Greci,¹ and thence on horseback the realm of Algarve,² and so by Baldacca³ I came to Parione,⁴ whence, somewhat athirst, I after a while got on to Sardinia.⁵ But wherefore go I about to enumerate all the lands in which I pursued my quest? Having passed the straits of San Giorgio, I arrived at Truffia⁶ and Buffia,⁷ countries thickly populated and with great nations, whence I pursued my journey to Menzogna,⁸ where I met with many of our own brethren, and of other religious not a few, intent one and all on eschewing hardship for the love of God, making little account of others' toil, so they might ensue their own advantage, and paying in nought but unminted coin throughout the length and breadth

¹Perhaps part of the "sesto" of Florence known as the Borgo, as the tradition of the commentators that the friar's itinerary is wholly Florentine is not to be lightly set aside.

²*Il Garbo*, a quarter or street in Florence, so called because the wares of Algarve were there sold.

³A famous tavern in Florence.

⁴A "borgo" in Florence.

⁵A suburb of Florence on the Arno.

⁶Cajolery.

⁷Drollery.

⁸Lie.

of the country ; and so I came to the land of Abruzzi, where the men and women go in pattens on the mountains, and clothe the hogs with their own entrails ;¹ and a little further on I found folk that carried bread in staves and wine in sacks. And leaving them, I arrived at the mountains of the Bachi, where all the waters run downwards. In short I penetrated so far that I came at last to India Pastinaca, where I swear to you by the habit that I wear, that I saw pruning-hooks² fly: a thing that none would believe that had not seen it. Whereof be my witness that I lie not Maso del Saggio, that great merchant, whom I found there cracking nuts, and selling the shells by retail ! However, not being able to find that whereof I was in quest, because from thence one must travel by water, I turned back, and so came at length to the Holy Land, where in summer cold bread costs four deniers, and hot bread is to be had for nothing. And there I found the venerable father Nonmiblasmetesevoipiac,³ the most worshipful Patriarch of Jerusalem ; who out of respect for the habit that I have ever worn, to wit, that of Baron Master St. Antony, was pleased to let me see all the holy relics that he had by him, which were so many, that, were I to enumerate them all, I should not come to the end of them in some miles. However, not to disappoint you, I will tell you a few of them. In the first place, then, he shewed me the finger of the Holy Spirit, as whole and entire as it ever was, and the tuft of the Seraph that appeared to St. Francis, and one of the nails of the Cherubim, and one of the ribs of the Verbum-Caro-fatti-alle-finestre,⁴ and some of the vestments of the Saint Fe Cattolica⁵ and some of the rays of the star that appeared to the Magi in the East, and a phial of the sweat of St. Michael a-battling with the Devil and the jaws of death of St. Lazarus, and other relics. And for

¹A reference to sausage-making.

²A *jeu de mots*, "pennati," pruning-hooks, signifying also *feathered*, though "pennuti" is more common in that sense.

³Takemenottotaskanitlikeyou.

⁴*fatti alle finestre*, said for "*factum est*," through ignorance.

⁵*saint fe Cattolica* : He believes that Fe (=faith) Catholic is the name of a saintly woman.

that I gave him a liberal supply of the pages of Monte Morello in the vulgar and some chapters of Caprezio, of which he had long been in quest, he was pleased to let me participate in his holy relics, and gave me one of the teeth of the Holy Cross, and in a small phial a bit of the sound of the bells of Solomon's temple, and this feather of the Angel Gabriel, whereof I have told you, and one of the pattens of San Gherardo da Villa Magna, which, not long ago, I gave at Florence to Gherardo di Bonsi, who holds him in prodigious veneration. He also gave me some of the coals with which the most blessed martyr, St. Lawrence, was roasted. All which things I devoutly brought thence, and have them all safe. True it is that my superior has not hitherto permitted me to shew them, until he should be certified that they are genuine. However, now that this is avouched by certain miracles wrought by them, of which we have tidings by letter from the Patriarch, he has given me leave to shew them. But, fearing to trust them to another, I always carry them with me ; and to tell you the truth I carry the feather of the Angel Gabriel, lest it should get spoiled, in a casket, and the coals, with which St. Lawrence was roasted, in another casket ; which caskets are so like the one to the other, that not seldom I mistake one for the other, which has befallen me on this occasion ; for, whereas I thought to have brought with me the casket wherein is the feather, I have brought instead that which contains the coals. Nor deem I this a mischance ; nay, methinks, 'tis by interposition of God, and that He Himself put the casket of coals in my hand, for I mind me that the feast of St. Lawrence falls but two days hence. Wherefore God, being minded that by shewing you the coals, with which he was roasted, I should rekindle in your souls the devotion that you ought to feel towards him, guided my hand, not to the feather which I meant to take, but to the blessed coals that were extinguished by the humours that exuded from that most holy body. And so, blessed children, bare your heads and devoutly draw nigh to see them. But first of all I would have you know, that whoso has the sign of the cross made upon him with these coals, may

live secure for the whole of the ensuing year, that fire shall not touch him, that he feel it not."

Having so said, the friar, chanting a hymn in praise of St. Lawrence, opened the casket, and shewed the coals. Whereon the foolish crowd gazed a while in awe and reverent wonder, and then came pressing forward in a mighty throng about Fra Cipolla with offerings beyond their wont, each and all praying him to touch them with the coals. Wherefore Fra Cipolla took the coals in his hand, and set about making on their white blouses, and on their doublets, and on the veils of the women crosses as big as might be, averring the while that whatever the coals might thus lose would be made good to them again in the casket, as he had often proved. On this wise, to his exceeding great profit, he marked all the folk of Certaldo with the cross, and, thanks to his ready wit and resource, had his laugh at those, who by robbing him of the feather thought to make a laughing-stock of him. They, indeed, being among his hearers, and marking his novel expedient, and how voluble he was, and what a long story he made of it, laughed till they thought their jaws would break ; and, when the congregation was dispersed, they went up to him, and never so merrily told him what they had done, and returned him his feather ; which next year proved no less lucrative to him than that day the coals had been.

(II)

THE BASIL POT

(Translated by J. M. RIGG)

THERE were at Messina three young men, that were brothers and merchants, who were left very rich on the death of their father, who was of San Gimignano ; and they had a sister, Lisabetta by name, a girl fair enough, and no less debonair, but whom, for some reason or another, they had not as yet bestowed in marriage. The three brothers had also in their shop a young Pisan, Lorenzo by name, who managed all their affairs, and who was so goodly of person and gallant, that Lisabetta bestowed many a glance upon him, and began to regard him with extraordinary favour ; which Lorenzo marking from time to time, gave up all his other amours, and in like manner began to affect her, and so, their loves being equal, 'twas not long before they took heart of grace, and did that which each most desired. Wherein continuing to their no small mutual solace and delight, they neglected to order it with due secrecy, whereby one night as Lisabetta was going to Lorenzo's room, she, all unwitting, was observed by the eldest of the brothers, who, albeit much distressed by what he had learnt, yet, being a young man of discretion, was swayed by considerations more seemly, and, allowing no word to escape him, spent the night in turning the affair over in his mind in divers ways. On the morrow he told his brothers that which, touching Lisabetta and Lorenzo, he had observed in the night, which, that no shame might thence ensue either to them or to their sister, they after long consultation determined to pass over in silence, making as if they had seen or heard nought thereof, until such time as they in a safe and convenient manner might banish this disgrace from their sight before it could go further. Adhering to which purpose, they jested

and laughed with Lorenzo as they had been wont ; and after a while pretending that they were all three going forth of the city on pleasure, they took Lorenzo with them ; and being come to a remote and very lone spot, seeing that 'twas apt for their design, they took Lorenzo, who was completely off his guard, and slew him, and buried him on such wise that none was ware of it. On their return to Messina they gave out that they had sent him away on business ; which was readily believed, because 'twas what they had been frequently used to do. But as Lorenzo did not return, and Lisabetta questioned the brothers about him with great frequency and urgency, being sorely grieved by his long absence, it so befell that one day, when she was very pressing in her enquiries, one of the brothers said :—"What means this ? What hast thou to do with Lorenzo, that thou shouldst ask about him so often ? Ask us no more, or we will give thee such answer as thou deservest." So the girl, sick at heart and sorrowful, fearing she knew not what, asked no questions ; but many a time at night she called piteously to him, and besought him to come to her, and bewailed his long tarrying with many a tear, and ever yearning for his return, languished in total dejection.

But so it was that one night, when, after long weeping that her Lorenzo came not back, she had at last fallen asleep, Lorenzo appeared to her in a dream, wan and in utter disarray, his clothes torn to shreds and sodden ; and thus, as she thought, he spoke :—"Lisabetta, thou dost nought but call me, and vex thyself for my long tarrying, and bitterly upbraid me with thy tears ; wherefore be it known to thee that return to thee I may not, because the last day that thou didst see me thy brothers slew me." After which, he described the place where they had buried him, told her to call and expect him no more, and vanished. The girl then awoke, and doubting not that the vision was true, wept bitterly. And when morning came, and she was risen, not daring to say aught to her brothers, she resolved to go to the place indicated in the vision and see if what she had dreamed were even as it had appeared to her. So, having leave to go a little way out of the city for

recreation in company with a maid that had at one time lived with them and knew all that she did, she hied her thither with all speed ; and having removed the dry leaves that were strewn about the place, she began to dig where the earth seemed least hard. Nor had she dug long, before she found the body of her hapless lover, whereon as yet there was no trace of corruption or decay ; and thus she saw without any manner of doubt that her vision was true. And so, saddest of women, knowing that she might not bewail him there, she would gladly, if she could, have carried away the body and given it more honourable sepulture elsewhere ; but as she might not so do, she took a knife, and, as best she could, severed the head from the trunk, and wrapped it in a napkin and laid it in the lap of her maid ; and having covered the rest of the corpse with earth, she left the spot, having been seen by none, and went home. There she shut herself up in her room, with the head, and kissed it a thousand times in every part, and wept long and bitterly over it, till she had bathed it in her tears. She then wrapped it in a piece of fine cloth, and set it in a large and beautiful pot of the sort in which marjoram or basil is planted, and covered it with earth, and therein planted some roots of the goodliest basil of Salerno, and drenched them only with her tears, or water perfumed with roses or orange-blossoms. And 'twas her wont ever to sit beside this pot, and, all her soul one yearning, to pore upon it, as that which enshrined her Lorenzo, and when long time she had so done, she would bend over it, and weep a great while, until the basil was quite bathed in her tears.

Fostered with such constant, unremitting care, and nourished by the richness given to the soil by the decaying head that lay therein, the basil burgeoned out in exceeding great beauty and fragrance. And, the girl persevering ever in this way to life, the neighbours from time to time took note of it, and when her brothers marvelled to see her beauty ruined, and her eyes as it were evanished from her head, they told them of it, saying :—"We have observed that such is her daily wont." Whereupon the brothers, marking her behaviour,

chid her therefore once or twice, and as she heeded them not, caused the pot to be taken privily from her. Which, so soon as she missed it, she demanded with the utmost instance and insistence, and, as they gave it not back to her, ceased not to wail and weep, insomuch that she fell sick ; nor in her sickness craved she aught but the pot of basil. Whereat the young men, marvelling mightily, resolved to see what the pot might contain ; and having removed the earth they espied the cloth, and therein the head, which was not yet so decayed, but that by the curled locks they knew it for Lorenzo's head. Passing strange they found it, and fearing lest it should be bruited abroad, they buried the head, and, with as little said as might be, took order for their privy departure from Messina, and hied them thence to Naples. The girl ceased not to weep and crave her pot, and, so weeping, died.

(III)

THE STONE IN THE WELL

(Translated by J. M. Rigg)

K N O W , then, that there dwelt aforetime at Arezzo a rich man, Tofano by name, who took to wife Monna Ghita, a lady exceeding fair, of whom, for what cause he knew not, he presently grew jealous. Whereof the lady being ware, waxed resentful, and having on divers occasions demanded of him the reason of his jealousy, and gotten from him nought precise, but only generalities and trivialities, resolved at last to give him cause enough to die of that evil which without cause he so much dreaded. And being ware that a gallant, whom she

deemed well worthy of her, was enamoured of her, she, using due discretion, came to an understanding with him ; which being brought to the point that it only remained to give effect to their words in act, the lady cast about to devise how this might be. And witting that, among other bad habits that her husband had, he was too fond of his cups, she would not only commend indulgence, but cunningly and not seldom incite him thereto ; insomuch that, well-nigh as often as she was so minded, she led him to drink to excess ; and when she saw that he was well drunken, she would put him to bed ; and so not once only but divers times without any manner of risk she forgathered with her lover ; nay, presuming upon her husband's intoxication, she grew so bold that, not content with bringing her lover into her house, she would at times go spend a great part of the night with him at his house, which was not far off.

Now such being the enamoured lady's constant practice, it so befell that the dishonoured husband took note that, while she egged him on to drink, she herself drank never a drop ; whereby he came to suspect the truth, to wit, that the lady was making him drunk, that afterwards she might take her pleasure while he slept. And being minded to put his surmise to the proof, one evening, having drunken nought all day, he mimicked never so drunken a sot both in speech and in carriage. The lady, deeming him to be really as he appeared, and that 'twas needless to ply him with liquor, presently put him to bed. Which done, she, as she at times was wont, hied her forth to her lover's house, where she tarried until midnight. Tofano no sooner perceived that his wife was gone, than up he got, hied him to the door, locked it, and then posted himself at the window to observe her return, and let her know that he was ware of her misconduct. So there he stood until the lady returned, and finding herself locked out, was annoyed beyond measure, and sought to force the door open. Tofano let her try her strength upon it a while, and then :—"Madam," quoth he, "'tis all to no purpose : thou canst not get in. Go get thee back thither where thou hast carried all this while, and rest assured that thou shalt never

recross this threshold, until I have done thee such honour as is meet for thee in the presence of thy kinsfolk and neighbours." Thereupon the lady fell entreating him to be pleased to open to her for the love of God, for that she was not come whence he supposed, but had only been passing the time with one of her gossips, because the nights were long, and she could not spend the whole time either in sleep or in solitary watching. But her supplications availed her nothing, for the fool was determined that all Arezzo should know their shame, whereof as yet none wist aught. So as 'twas idle to entreat, the lady assumed a menacing tone, saying :—"So thou open not to me, I will make thee the saddest man alive." Whereto Tofano made answer :—"And what then canst thou do?" The lady, her wits sharpened by Love, rejoined :—"Rather than endure the indignity to which thou wouldst unjustly subject me, I will cast myself into the well hard by here, and when I am found dead there, all the world will believe that 'twas thou that didst it in thy cups, and so thou wilt either have to flee and lose all that thou hast and be outlawed, or forfeit thy head as guilty of my death, as indeed thou wilt be." But, for all she said, Tofano wavered not a jot in his foolish purpose. So at last :—"Lo, now," quoth the lady, "I can no more abide thy surly humour : God forgive thee : I leave thee my distaff here, which be careful to bestow in a safe place." So saying, away she hied her to the well, and, the night being so dark that wayfarers could scarce see one another as they passed, she took up a huge stone that was by the well, and ejaculating, "God forgive me !" dropped it therein. Tofano, hearing the mighty splash that the stone made as it struck the water, never doubted that she had cast herself in : so, bucket and rope in hand, he flung himself out of the house, and came running to the well to her rescue. The lady had meanwhile hidden herself hard by the door, and seeing him make for the well, was in the house in a trice, and having locked the door, hied her to the window, and greeted him with :—" 'Tis while thou art drinking, not now, when the night is far spent, that thou shouldst temper thy wine with water." Thus derided,

Tofano came back to the door, and finding his ingress barred, began adjuring her to let him in. Whereupon, changing the low tone she had hitherto used for one so shrill that 'twas well-nigh a shriek, she broke out with :—"By the Holy Rood, tedious drunken sot that thou art, thou gettest no admittance here to-night ; thy ways are more than I can endure : 'tis time I let all the world know what manner of man thou art, and at what hour of the night thou comest home." Tofano, on his part, now grew angry, and began loudly to upbraid her ; inso-much that the neighbours, aroused by the noise, got up, men and women alike, and looked out of the windows, and asked what was the matter. Whereupon the lady fell a-weeping and saying :—" 'Tis this wicked man, who comes home drunk at even, or falls asleep in some tavern, and then returns at this hour. Long and to no purpose have I borne with him ; but 'tis now past endurance, and I have done him this indignity of locking him out of the house in the hope that perchance it may cause him to mend his ways."

Tofano, on his part, told, dolt that he was, just what had happened, and was mighty menacing. Whereupon :—"Now mark," quoth the lady to the neighbours, "the sort of man he is ! What would you say if I were, as he is, in the street, and he were in the house, as I am ? God's faith, I doubt you would believe what he said. Hereby you may gauge his sense. He tells you that I have done just what, I doubt not, he has done himself. He thought to terrify me by throwing I know not what into the well, wherein would to God he had thrown himself indeed, and drowned himself, whereby the wine of which he had taken more than enough, had been watered to some purpose !" The neighbours, men and women alike, now with one accord gave tongue, censuring Tofano, throwing all the blame upon him, and answering what he alleged against the lady with loud recrimination ; and in short the bruit, passing from neighbour to neighbour, reached at last the ears of the lady's kinsfolk ; who hied them to the spot, and being apprised of the affair from this, that the other of the neighbours, laid hands on Tofano, and beat him till he was black and blue

from head to foot. Which done, they entered his house, stripped it of all that belonged to the lady, and took her home with them, bidding Tofano look for worse to come. Thus hard bested, and ruing the plight in which his jealousy had landed him, Tofano, who loved his wife with all his heart, set some friends to work to patch matters up, whereby he did in fact induce his lady to forgive him and live with him again ; albeit he was fain to promise her never again to be jealous, and to give her leave to amuse herself to her heart's content, provided she used such discretion that he should not be ware of it. On such wise, like the churl and booby that he was, being despoiled, he made terms. Now long live Love, and perish war, and all that wage it !

(IV)

THE HAUNTED PINWOOD

(Translated by J. M. RIGG)

IN Ravenna, that most ancient city of Romagna, there dwelt of yore noblemen and gentlemen not a few, among whom was a young man, Nastagio degli Onesti by name, who by the death of his father and one of his uncles inherited immense wealth. Being without a wife, Nastagio, as 'tis the way with young men, became enamoured of a daughter of Messer Paola Traversaro, a damsel of much higher birth than his, whose love he hoped to win by gifts and the like modes of courting, which, albeit they were excellent and fair and commendable, not only availed him not, but seemed rather to

have the contrary effect, so harsh and ruthless and unrelenting did the beloved damsel shew herself towards him ; for whether it was her uncommon beauty or her noble lineage that puffed her up, so haughty and disdainful was she grown that pleasure she had none either in him or in aught that pleased him.

The burden of which disdain Nastagio found so hard to bear, that many a time, when he had made his moan, he longed to make away with himself. However he refrained therefrom, and many a time resolved to give her up altogether, or, if so he might, to hold her in despite, as she did him : but 'twas all in vain, for it seemed as if, the more his hope dwindled, the greater grew his love. And, as thus he continued, loving and spending inordinately, certain of his kinsfolk and friends, being apprehensive lest he should waste both himself and his substance, did many a time counsel and beseech him to depart Ravenna, and go tarry for a time elsewhere, that so he might at once cool his flame and reduce his charges. For a long while Nastagio answered their admonitions with banter ; but as they continued to ply him with them, he grew weary of saying no so often, and promised obedience. Whereupon he equipped himself as if for a journey to France or Spain, or other distant parts, got on horseback and sallied forth of Ravenna, accompanied by not a few of his friends, and being come to a place called Chiassi, about three miles from Ravenna, he halted, and having sent for tents and pavilions, told his companions that there he meant to stay, and they might go back to Ravenna.

So Nastagio pitched his camp, and there commenced to live after as fine and lordly a fashion as did ever any man, bidding divers of his friends from time to time to breakfast or sup with him, as he had been wont to do.

Now it so befell that about the beginning of May, the season being very fine, he fell a-brooding on the cruelty of his mistress, and, that his meditations might be the less disturbed, he bade all his servants leave him, and sauntered slowly, wrapt in thought, as far as the pinewood. Which he had threaded

for a good half-mile, when, the fifth hour of the day being well-nigh past, yet he recking neither of food nor of aught else, 'twas as if he heard a woman wailing exceedingly and uttering most piercing shrieks : whereat, the train of his sweet melancholy being broken, he raised his head to see what was toward, and wondered to find himself in the pinewood ; and saw, moreover, before him running through a grove, close set with underwood and brambles, towards the place where he was, a damsel most comely, stark naked, her hair dishevelled, and her flesh all torn by the briers and brambles, who wept and cried piteously for mercy ; and at her flanks he saw two mastiffs, exceeding great and fierce, that ran hard upon her track and not seldom came up with her and bit her cruelly ; and in the rear he saw, riding a black horse, a knight sadly accoutred, and very wrathful of mien, carrying a rapier in his hand, and with despiteful, blood-curdling words threatening her with death. Whereat he was at once amazed and appalled, and then filled with compassion for the hapless lady, whereof was bred a desire to deliver her, if so he might, from such anguish and peril of death. Wherefore, as he was unarmed, he ran and took in lieu of a cudgel a branch of a tree, with which he prepared to encounter the dogs and the knight. Which the knight observing, called to him before he was come to close quarters, saying :—"Hold off, Nastagio, leave the dogs and me alone to deal with this vile woman as she has deserved." And, even as he spoke, the dogs gripped the damsel so hard on either flank that they arrested her flight, and the knight, being come up, dismounted. Whom Nastagio approached, saying :—"I know not who thou art, that knowest me so well, but thus much I tell thee : 'tis a gross outrage for an armed knight to go about to kill a naked woman, and set his dogs upon her as if she were a wild beast : rest assured that I shall do all I can to protect her." Whereupon :—"Nastagio," replied the knight, "of the same city as thou was I, and thou wast yet a little lad when I, Messer Guido degli Anastagi by name, being far more enamoured of this damsel than thou art now of her of the Traversari, was by her haughtiness and cruelty brought to

so woeful a pass that one day in a fit of despair I slew myself with this rapier which thou seest in my hand ; for which cause I am condemned to the eternal pains. Nor was it long after my death that she, who exulted therein over measure, also died, and for that she repented her not of her cruelty and the joy she had of my sufferings, for which she took not blame to herself, but merit, was likewise condemned to the pains of hell. Nor had she sooner made her descent, than for her pain and mine 'twas ordained, that she should flee before me, and that I, who so loved her, should pursue her, not as my beloved lady, but as my mortal enemy, and so, as often as I come up with her, I slay her with this same rapier with which I slew myself, and having ripped her up by the back, I take out that hard and cold heart, to which neither love nor pity had ever access, and therewith her other inward parts, as thou shalt forthwith see, and cast them to these dogs to eat. And in no long time, as the just and mighty God decrees, she rises even as if she had not died, and recommences her dolorous flight, I and the dogs pursuing her. And it so falls out that every Friday about this hour I here come up with her, and slaughter her as thou shalt see ; but ween not that we rest on other days; for there are other places in which I overtake her, places in which she used, or devised how she might use, me cruelly ; on which wise, changed as thou seest from her lover into her foe, I am to pursue her for years as many as the months during which she shewed herself harsh to me. Wherefore leave me to execute the decree of the Divine justice, and presume not to oppose that which thou mayst not avail to withstand."

Affrighted by the knight's words, insomuch that there was scarce a hair on his head but stood on end, Nastagio shrank back, still gazing on the hapless damsel, and waited all a-tremble to see what the knight would do. Nor had he long to wait ; for the knight, as soon as he had done speaking, sprang, rapier in hand, like a mad dog upon the damsel, who, kneeling, while the two mastiffs gripped her tightly, cried him mercy ; but the knight, thrusting with all his force, struck her

between the breasts, and ran her clean through the body. Thus stricken, the damsel fell forthwith prone on the ground sobbing and shrieking : whereupon the knight drew forth a knife, and having therewith opened her in the back, took out the heart and all the circumjacent parts, and threw them to the two mastiffs, who, being famished, forthwith devoured them. And in no long time the damsel, as if nought thereof had happened, started to her feet, and took to flight towards the sea, pursued, and ever and anon bitten, by the dogs, while the knight, having gotten him to horse again, followed them as before, rapier in hand ; and so fast sped they that they were quickly lost to Nastagio's sight.

Long time he stood musing on what he had seen, divided between pity and terror, and then it occurred to him that, as this passed every Friday, it might avail him not a little. So, having marked the place, he rejoined his servants, and in due time thereafter sent for some of his kinsfolk and friends, and said to them :—" 'Tis now a long while that you urge me to give up loving this lady that is no friend to me, and therewith make an end of my extravagant way of living ; and I am now ready so to do, provided you procure me one favour, to wit, that next Friday Messer Paolo Traversaro, and his wife and daughter, and all the ladies, their kinswomen, and as many other ladies as you may be pleased to bid, come hither to breakfast with me : when you will see for yourselves the reason why I so desire." A small matter this seemed to them ; and so, on their return to Ravenna, they lost no time in conveying Nastagio's message to his intended guests : and, albeit she was hardly persuaded, yet in the end the damsel that Nastagio loved came with the rest.

Nastagio caused a lordly breakfast to be prepared, and had the tables set under the pines about the place where he had witnessed the slaughter of the cruel lady ; and in ranging the ladies and gentlemen at table he so ordered it that the damsel whom he loved was placed opposite the spot where it should be enacted. The last course was just served, when the despairing

cries of the hunted damsel became audible to all, to their no small amazement ; and each asking, and none knowing, what it might purport, up they all started intent to see what was toward ; and perceived the suffering damsel, and the knight and the dogs, who in a trice were in their midst. They hollaed amain to dogs and knight, and not a few advanced to succour the damsel : but the words of the knight, which were such as he had used to Nastagio, caused them to fall back, terror-stricken and lost in amazement. And when the knight proceeded to do as he had done before, all the ladies that were there, many of whom were of kin to the suffering damsel and to the knight, and called to mind his love and death, wept as bitterly as if 'twere their own case.

When 'twas all over, and the lady and the knight had disappeared, the strange scene set those that witnessed it pondering many and divers matters : but among them all none was appalled as the cruel damsel that Nastagio loved, who, having clearly seen and heard all that had passed, and being ware that it touched her more nearly than any other by reason of the harshness that she had ever shewn to Nastagio, seemed already to be fleeing from her angered lover, and to have the mastiffs on her flanks. And so great was her terror that, lest a like fate should befall her, she converted her aversion into affection, and as soon as occasion served, which was that very night, sent a trusty chambermaid privily to Nastagio with a request that he would be pleased to come to her, for that she was ready in all respects to pleasure him to the full. Nastagio made answer that he was greatly flattered, but that he was minded with her consent to have his pleasure of her in an honourable way, to wit, by marrying her. The damsel, who knew that none but herself was to blame that she was not already Nastagio's wife, made answer that she consented. Wherefore by her own mouth she acquainted her father and mother that she agreed to marry Nastagio ; and, they heartily approving her choice, Nastagio wedded her on the ensuing Sunday, and lived happily with her many a year. Nor was

it in her instance alone that this terror was productive of good : on the contrary, it so wrought among the ladies of Ravenna that they all became, and have ever since been, much more compliant with men's desires than they were wont to be.

(V)

THE STOLEN PIG

(Translated by J. M. Rigg)

WH O Calandrino, Bruno and Buffalmacco were, I need not explain ; you know them well enough from the former story ; and therefore I will tarry no longer than to say that Calandrino had a little estate not far from Florence, which his wife had brought him by way of dowry, and which yielded them yearly, among other matters, a pig ; and 'twas his custom every year in the month of December to resort to the farm with his wife, there to see to the killing and salting of the said pig. Now, one of these years it so happened that his wife being unwell, Calandrino went thither alone to kill the pig. And Bruno and Buffalmacco learning that he was gone to the farm, and that his wife was not with him, betook them to the house of a priest that was their especial friend and a neighbour of Calandrino, there to tarry a while. Upon their arrival Calandrino, who had that very morning killed the pig, met them with the priest, and accosted them, saying :—"A hearty welcome to you. I should like you to see what an excellent manager I am" ; and so he took them into his house, and shewed them the pig. They observed that 'twas a very fine pig ; and learned from Calandrino that he was minded to salt

if for household consumption. "Then thou art but a fool," quoth Bruno. "Sell it, man, and let us have a jolly time with the money ; and tell thy wife that 'twas stolen." "Not I," replied Calandrino : "she would never believe me, and would drive me out of the house. Urge me no further, for I will never do it." The others said a great deal more, but to no purpose ; and Calandrino bade them to supper, but so coldly that they declined, and left him.

Presently :—"Should we not steal this pig from him to-night ?" quoth Bruno to Buffalmacco. "Could we so ?" returned Buffalmacco. "How ?" "Why as to that," rejoined Bruno, "I have already marked how it may be done, if he bestow not the pig elsewhere." "So be it, then," said Buffalmacco : "we will steal it ; and then, perchance, our good host, Master Priest, will joint us in doing honour to such good cheer ?" "That right gladly will I," quoth the priest. Whereupon :—"Some address, though," quoth Bruno, "will be needful : thou knowest, Buffalmacco, what a niggardly fellow Calandrino is, and how greedily he drinks at other folks' expense. Go we, therefore, and take him to the tavern, and there let the priest make as if, to do us honour, he would pay the whole score, and suffer Calandrino to pay never a soldo, and he will grow tipsy, and then we shall speed excellent well, because he is alone in the house."

As Bruno proposed, so they did : and Calandrino, finding that the priest would not suffer him to pay, drank amain, and took a great deal more aboard than he had need of ; and the night being far spent when he left the tavern, he dispensed with supper, and went home, and thinking to have shut the door, got him to bed, leaving it open. Buffalmacco and Bruno went to sup with the priest ; and after supper, taking with them certain implements with which to enter Calandrino's house, where Bruno thought it most feasible, they stealthily approached it ; but finding the door open, they entered, and took down the pig, and carried it away to the priest's house, and having there bestowed it safely, went to bed.

In the morning when Calandrino, his head at length quit of the fumes of the wine, got up, and came downstairs and found that his pig was nowhere to be seen, and that the door was open, he asked this, that, and the other man whether they wist who had taken the pig away, and getting no answer, he began to make a great outcry :—"Alas, alas ! luckless man that I am, that my pig should have been stolen from me !" Meanwhile Bruno and Buffalmacco, being also risen, made up to him, to hear what he would say touching the pig. Whom he no sooner saw, than well-nigh weeping he called them, saying :—"Alas ! my friends ! my pig is stolen from me." Bruno stepped up to him and said in a low tone :—" 'Tis passing strange if thou art in the right for once." "Alas !" returned Calandrino, "what I say is but too true." "Why, then, out with it, man," quoth Bruno, "cry aloud, that all folk may know that 'tis so." Calandrino then raised his voice and said :—"By the body o' God I say of a truth that my pig has been stolen from me." "So !" quoth Bruno, "but publish it, man, publish it; lift up thy voice, make thyself well heard, that all may believe thy report." "Thou art enough to make me give my soul to the Enemy," replied Calandrino. "I say—dost not believe me ?—that hang me by the neck if the pig is not stolen from me !" "Nay, but," quoth Bruno, "how can it be ? I saw it here but yesterday. Dost think to make me believe that it has taken to itself wings and flown away ?" "All the same 'tis as I tell thee," returned Calandrino. "Is it possible ?" quoth Bruno "Ay, indeed," replied Calandrino ; "'tis even so : and I am undone, and know not how to go home. Never will my wife believe me ; or if she do so, I shall know no peace this year." "Upon my hope of salvation," quoth Bruno, "'tis indeed a bad business, if so it really is. But thou knowest, Calandrino, that 'twas but yesterday I counselled thee to make believe that 'twas so. I should be sorry to think thou dist be-fool thy wife and us at the same time." "Ah ! vociferated Calandrino, "wilt thou drive me to despair and provoke me to blaspheme God and the saints and all the company of heaven ? I tell thee that the pig has been stolen from me in the

night." Whereupon :—"If so it be," quoth Buffalmacco, "we must find a way, if we can, to recover it." "Find a way?" said Calandrino : "how can we compass that?" "Why," replied Buffalmacco, "'tis certain that no one has come from India to steal thy pig : it must have been one of thy neighbours, and if thou couldst bring them together, I warrant thee, I know how to make the assay with bread and cheese, and we will find out in a trice who has had the pig." "Ay," struck in Bruno, "make thy assay with bread and cheese in the presence of these gentry hereabout, one of whom I am sure has had the pig ! why, the thing would be seen through : and they would not come." "What shall we do, then?" said Buffalmacco. Whereunto Bruno made answer :—"It must be done with good pills of ginger and good vernaccia ; and they must be bidden come drink with us. They will suspect nothing, and will come ; and pills of ginger can be blessed just as well as bread and cheese." "Beyond a doubt, thou art right," quoth Buffalmacco ; "and thou, Calandrino, what sayest thou ? Shall we do as Bruno says?" "Nay, I entreat you, for the love of God," quoth Calandrino, "do even so : for if I knew but who has had the pig, I should feel myself half consoled for my loss." "Go to, now," quoth Bruno, "I am willing to do thy errand to Florence for these commodities, if thou givest me the money."

Calandrino had some forty soldi upon him, which he gave to Bruno, who thereupon hied him to Florence to a friend of his that was an apothecary, and bought a pound of good pills of ginger, two of which, being of dog-ginger, he caused to be compounded with fresh hepatic aloes, and then to be coated with sugar like the others ; and lest they should be lost, or any of the others mistaken for them, he had a slight mark set upon them by which he might readily recognize them. He also bought a flask of good vernaccia, and, thus laden, returned to the farm, and said to Calandrino :—"To-morrow morning thou wilt bid those whom thou suspectest come hither to drink with thee : as 'twill be a saint's day, they will all come readily enough ; and to-night I and Buffalmacco will say the incantation over the pills, which in the morning I will bring

to thee here, and for our friendship's sake will administer them myself, and do and say all that needs to be said and done." So Calandrino did as Bruno advised ; and on the morrow a goodly company, as well of young men from Florence, that happened to be in the village, as of husbandmen, being assembled in front of the church around the elm, Bruno and Buffalmacco came, bearing a box containing the ginger, and the flask of wine, and ranged the folk in a circle. Whereupon :—"Gentlemen," said Bruno, "'tis meet I tell you the reason why you are gathered here, that if aught unpleasant to you should befall, you may have no ground for complaint against me. Calandrino here was the night before last robbed of a fine pig, and cannot discover who has had it ; and, for that it must have been stolen by some one of us here, he would have each of you take and eat one of these pills and drink of this vernaccia. Wherefore I forthwith do you to wit, that whoso has had the pig will not be able to swallow the pill, but will find it more bitter than poison, and will spit it out ; and so, rather than he should suffer this shame in presence of so many, 'twere perhaps best that he that has had the pig should confess the fact to the priest, and I will wash my hands of the affair."

All professed themselves ready enough to eat the pills ; and so, having set them in a row with Calandrino among them, Bruno, beginning at one end, proceeded to give each a pill, and when he came to Calandrino he chose one of the pills of dog-ginger and put it in his hand. Calandrino thrust it forthwith between his teeth and began to chew it ; but no sooner was his tongue acquainted with the aloes, than, finding the bitterness intolerable, he spat it out. Now, the eyes of all the company being fixed on one another to see who should spit out his pill, Bruno, who, not having finished the distribution, feigned to be concerned with nought else, heard some one in his rear say :—"Ha ! Calandrino, what means this ?" and at once turning round, and marking that Calandrino had spit out his pill :—"Wait a while," quoth he, "perchance 'twas somewhat else that caused thee to spit : take another" ; and

thereupon whipped out the other pill of dog-ginger, he set it between Calandrino's teeth, and finished the distribution. Bitter as Calandrino had found the former pill, he found this tenfold more so ; but being ashamed to spit it out, he kept it a while in his mouth and chewed it, and, as he did so, tears stood in his eyes that shewed as large as filberts, and at length, being unable to bear it any longer, he spat it out, as he had its predecessor. Which being observed by Buffalmacco and Bruno, who were then administering the wine, and by all the company, 'twas averred by common consent that Calandrino had committed the theft himself ; for which cause certain of them took him severely to task.

However, the company being dispersed, and Bruno and Buffalmacco left alone with Calandrino, Buffalmacco began on this wise :—"I never doubted but that thou hadst had it thyself, and wast minded to make us believe that it had been stolen from thee, that we might not have of thee so much as a single drink out of the price which thou gottest for it." Calandrino, with the bitterness of the aloes still on his tongue, fell as swearing that he had not had it. Whereupon :—"Nay, but, comrade," quoth Buffalmacco, "upon thy honour, what did it fetch ? Six florins ?" Whereto, Calandrino being now on the verge of desperation, Bruno added :—"Now be reasonable, Calandrino ; among the company that ate and drank with us there was one that told me that thou hadst up there a girl that thou dist keep for thy pleasure, giving her what by hook or by crook thou couldst get together, and that he held it for certain that thou hadst sent her this pig. And thou art grown expert in this sort of cozenage. Thou tookest us one while adown the Mugnone a-gathering black stones, and having thus started us on a wild-goose chase, thou madest off ; and then wouldst fain have us believe that thou hadst found the stone : and now, in like manner, thou thinkest by thine oaths to persuade us that this pig which thou hast given away or sold has been stolen from thee. But we know thy tricks of old ; never another couldst thou play us ; and, to be round with thee, this spell has cost us some trouble : wherefore we mean that thou shalt give

us two pair of capons, or we will let Monna Tessa know all." Seeing that he was not believed, and deeming his mortification ample without the addition of his wife's resentment, Calandrino gave them the two pair of capons, with which, when the pig was salted, they returned to Florence, leaving Calandrino with the loss and the laugh against him.

(VI)

THE REVENGE OF NATHAN

(Translated by J. M. RIGG)

B E Y O N D all question, if we may believe the report of certain Genoese, and other folk that have been in those regions, there dwelt of yore in the parts of Cathay one Nathan, a man of noble lineage and incomparable wealth. Who, having a seat hard by a road, by which whoso would travel from the West eastward, or from the East westward, must needs pass, and being magnanimous and liberal, and zealous to approve himself such in act, did set on work cunning artificers not a few, and cause one of the finest and largest and most luxurious palaces that ever were seen to be there builded and furnished in the goodliest manner with all things meet for the reception and honourable entertainment of gentlemen. And so, keeping a great array of excellent servants, he courteously and hospitably did the honours of his house to whoso came and went : in which laudable way of life he persevered, until not only the East but well-nigh all the West had heard his fame ; which thus, what time he was well stricken in years, albeit not for

that cause grown weary of shewing courtesy, reached the ears of one Mitridanes, a young man of a country not far distant. Who, knowing himself to be no less wealthy than Nathan, grew envious of the renown that he had of his good deeds, and resolved to obliterate, or at least to obscure it, by a yet greater liberality. So he had built for himself a palace like that of Nathan, of which he did the honours with a lavish courtesy that none had ever equalled, to whoso came or went that way; and verily in a short while he became famous enough.

Now it so befell that on a day when the young man was all alone in the courtyard of the palace, there came in by one of the gates a poor woman, who asked of him an alms, and had it; but, not content therewith, came again to him by the second gate, and asked another alms, and had it, and after the like sort did even unto the twelfth time; but, she returning for the thirteenth time:—"My good woman," quoth Mitridanes, "thou art not a little pertinacious in thy begging." Howbeit he gave her an alms. Whereupon:—"Ah! the wondrous liberality of Nathan!" quoth the beldam: "thirty-two gates are there to his palace, by every one of which I have entered, and asking alms of him, was never—for aught he shewed—recognized, or refused, and here, though I have entered as yet by but thirteen gates, I am recognized and reprimanded." And therewith she departed, and returned no more. Mitridanes, who accounted the mention of Nathan's fame an abatement of his own, was kindled by her words with a frenzy of wrath, and began thus to commune with himself:—"Alas! when shall I attain to the grandeur of Nathan's liberality, to say nought of transcending it, as I would fain, seeing that in the veriest trifles I cannot approach him? Of a surety my labour is in vain if I rid not the earth of him: which, since old age relieves me not of him, I must forthwith do with mine own hands. And in the flush of his despite up he started, and giving none to know of his purpose, got to horse with a small company, and after three days arrived at the palace where Nathan abode; and having enjoined his comrades to make as if they were none of his, and knew him not, and to go quarter them-

selves as best they might until they had his further orders, he, being thus alone, towards evening came upon Nathan, also alone, at no great distance from his splendid palace. Nathan was recreating himself by a walk, and was very simply clad ; so that Mitridanes, knowing him not, asked him if he could shew him where Nathan dwelt. "My son," replied Nathan gladsomely, "that can none in these parts better than I ; wherefore, so it please thee, I will bring thee thither." The young man replied that 'twould be mighty agreeable to him, but that, if so it might be, he had a mind to be neither known nor seen by Nathan. "And herein also," returned Nathan, "since 'tis thy pleasure, I will gratify thee." Whereupon Mitridanes dismounted, and with Nathan, who soon engaged him in delightful discourse, walked to the goodly palace. Arrived there Nathan caused one of his servants take the young man's horse, and drawing close to him, bade him in a whisper to see to it without delay that none in the house should tell the young man that he was Nathan ; and so 'twas done.

Being come into the palace, Nathan quartered Mitridanes in a most goodly chamber, where none saw him but those whom he had appointed to wait upon him ; and he himself kept him company, doing him all possible honour. Of whom Mitridanes, albeit he revered him as a father, yet, being thus with him, forbore not to ask who he was. Whereto Nathan made answer :—"I am a petty servant of Nathan : old as I am, I have been with him since my childhood, and never has he advanced me to higher office than this wherein thou seest me : wherefore, howsoever other folk may praise him, little cause have I to do so." Which words afforded Mitridanes some hope of carrying his wicked purpose into effect with more of plan and less of risk than had otherwise been possible. By and by Nathan very courteously asked him who he was, and what business brought him thither ; offering him such counsel and aid as he might be able to afford him. Mitridanes hesitated a while to reply : but at last he resolved to trust him, and when with no little circumlocution he had demanded of him fidelity, counsel and aid, he fully discovered to

him who he was, and the purpose and motive of his coming thither. Now, albeit to hear Mitridanes thus unfold his horrid design caused Nathan no small inward commotion, yet 'twas not long before courageously and composedly he thus made answer :—"Noble was thy father, Mitridanes, and thou art minded to shew thyself not unworthy of him by this lofty emprise of thine, to wit, of being liberal to all comers : and for that thou art envious of Nathan's merit I greatly commend thee ; for were many envious for a like cause, the world, from being a most wretched, would soon become a happy place. Doubt not that I shall keep secret the design which thou hast confided to me, for the furtherance whereof 'tis good advice rather than substantial aid that I have to offer thee. Which advice is this. Hence, perhaps half a mile off, thou mayst see a copse, in which almost every morning Nathan is wont to walk, taking his pleasure, for quite a long while : 'twill be an easy matter for thee to find him there, and deal with him as thou mayst be minded. Now, shouldst thou slay him, thou wilt get thee home with less risk of let, if thou take not the path by which thou camest hither, but that which thou seest issue from the copse on the left, for, though 'tis somewhat more rough, it leads more directly to thy house, and will be safer for thee."

Possessed of this information, Mitridanes, when Nathan had left him, privily apprised his comrades, who were likewise lodged in the palace, of the place where they were to await him on the ensuing day ; which being come, Nathan, inflexibly determined to act in all respects according to the advice which he had given Mitridanes, hied him forth to the copse unattended, to meet his death. Mitridanes, being risen, took his bow and sword, for other arms he had none with him, mounted his horse, and rode to the copse, through which, while he was yet some way off, he saw Nathan passing, quite alone. And being minded, before he fell upon him, to see his face and hear the sound of his voice, as, riding at a smart pace, he came up with him, he laid hold of him by his head-gear, exclaiming :—"Greybeard, thou art a dead man." Whereto

Nathan answered nought but :—"Then 'tis but my desert." But Mitridanes, hearing the voice, and scanning the face, forthwith knew him for the same man that had welcomed him heartily, consorted with him familiarly, and counselled him faithfully ; whereby his wrath presently subsided, and gave place to shame. Wherefore, casting away the sword that he held drawn in act to strike, he sprang from his horse, and weeping, threw himself at Nathan's feet, saying :—"Your liberality, dearest father, I acknowledge to be beyond all question, seeing with what craft you did plot your coming hither to yield me your life, for which, by mine own avowal, you knew that I, albeit cause I had none, did thirst. But God, more regardful of my duty than I myself, has now, in this moment of supreme stress, opened the eyes of my mind, that wretched envy had fast sealed. The prompter was your compliance, the greater is the debt of penitence that I owe you for my fault ; wherefore wreak even such vengeance upon me as you may deem answerable to my transgression." But Nathan raised Mitridanes to his feet, and tenderly embraced him, saying :—"My son, thy enterprise, howsoever thou mayst denote it, whether evil or otherwise, was not such that thou shouldst crave, or I give, pardon thereof ; for 'twas not in malice but in that thou wouldst fain have been reputed better than I that thou ensuedst it. Doubt then no more of me ; nay, rest assured that none that lives bears thee such love as I, who know the loftiness of thy spirit, bent not to heap up wealth, as do the caitiffs, but to dispense in bounty thine accumulated store. Think it no shame that to enhance thy reputation thou wouldst have slain me ; nor deem that I marvel thereat. To slay not one man, as thou wast minded, but countless multitudes, to waste whole countries with fire, and to raze cities to the ground has been well-nigh the sole art by which the mightiest emperors and the greatest kings have extended their dominions, and by consequence their fame. Wherefore, if thou, to increase thy fame, wouldst fain have slain me, 'twas nothing marvellous or strange, but wonted."

Whereto Mitridanes made answer, not to excuse his wicked

design, but to commend the seemly excuse found for it by Nathan, whom at length he told how beyond measure he marvelled that Nathan had not only been consenting to the enterprise, but had aided him therein by his counsel. But Nathan answered :—"Liefer had I, Mitridanes, that thou didst not marvel either at my consent or at my counsel, for that, since I was my own master and of a mind to that emprise whereon thou art also bent, never a soul came to my house, but, so far as in me lay, I gave him all that he asked of me. Thou camest, lusting for my life ; and so, when I heard thee crave it of me, I forthwith, that thou mightst not be the only guest to depart hence ill content, resolved to give it thee ; and to that end I gave thee such counsel as I deemed would serve thee both to the taking of my life and the preservation of thine own. Wherefore yet again I bid thee, nay, I entreat thee, if so thou art minded, to take it for thy satisfaction : I know not how I could better bestow it. I have had the use of it now for some eighty years, and pleasure and solace thereof ; and I know that, by the course of Nature and the common lot of man and all things mundane, it can continue to be mine for but a little while ; and so I deem that 'twere much better to bestow it, as I have ever bestowed and dispensed my wealth, than to keep it, until, against my will, it be reft from me by Nature. 'Twere but a trifle, though 'twere a hundred years : how insignificant, then, the six or eight years that are all I have to give ! Take it, then, if thou hadst lief, take it, I pray thee ; for, long as I have lived here, none have I found but thee to desire it ; nor know I when I may find another, if thou take it not, to demand it of me. And if, peradventure, I should find one such, yet I know that the longer I keep it, the less its worth will be ; wherefore, ere it be thus cheapened, take it, I implore thee."

Sore shame-stricken, Mitridanes made answer :—"Now God forefend that I should so much as harbour, as but now I did, such a thought, not to say do such a deed, as to wrest from you a thing so precious as your life, the years whereof, so far from abridging, I would gladly supplement with mine own." "So

then," rejoined Nathan promptly, "thou wouldst, if thou couldst, add thy years to mine, and cause me to serve thee as I never yet served any man, to wit, to take from thee that which is thine, I that never took aught from a soul !" "Ay, that would I," returned Mitridanes. "Then," quoth Nathan, "do as I shall bid thee. Thou art young : tarry here in my house, and call thyself Nathan ; and I will get me to thy house, and ever call myself Mitridanes." Whereto Mitridanes made answer :—"Were I but able to discharge this trust, as you have been and are, scarce would I hesitate to accept your offer ; but, as too sure am I that aught that I might do would but serve to lower Nathan's fame, and I am not minded to mar that in another which I cannot mend in myself, accept it I will not."

After which and the like interchange of delectable discourse, Nathan and Mitridanes, by Nathan's desire, returned to the palace ; where Nathan for some days honourably entreated Mitridanes, and by his sage counsel confirmed and encouraged him in his high and noble resolve ; after which, Mitridanes, being minded to return home with his company, took his leave of Nathan, fully persuaded that 'twas not possible to surpass him in liberality.

FRANCO SACCHETTI

(1330-1400)



(I)

A JESTING INQUISITOR

(Translated by M. G. STEEGMAN)

IN the time of Messer Guccio Tolomei there was in Siena a pleasant man, who was simple, and not malicious. He stammered in his speech and his name was Alberto. Being a man of good condition, he often frequented the house of the said Messer Guccio, because the knight had much delight in him. It happened that one day of Lent, Messer Guccio being together with the Inquisitor, whose great friend he was, it was agreed between them that upon the following day the said Alberto should be summoned, and that when he should be come before him, the Inquisitor should accuse him of some heresy, and hence should result a little pleasure both to the Inquisitor and to Messer Guccio. According unto the orders which Messer Guccio gave when he was returned unto his house, the next day very early the said Alberto was summoned that he should instantly appear before the Inquisitor. Alberto was all trembling, and if he stammered before, at this point he had almost lost all speech, and scarcely could he say : "I will come." And he went to seek Messer Guccio, saying :

"I would speak with you."

And Messer Guccio, understanding the matter, said : "What news ?"

Said Alberto : "Bad news for me, for the Inquisitor hath summoned me, and it may be he thinks I am a Patarin."¹

Said then Messer Guccio : "Hast thou spoken any thing against the Catholic faith?"

Alberto replied : "I know not what is the Catholic faith, but I believe myself to be a baptized Christian."

Messer Guccio said : "Alberto, do now as I shall tell thee. Go unto the bishop and say : 'I have been summoned, and here present myself before you,' and learn what he would say unto thee. Very soon afterwards I will come—and the Inquisitor² is a great friend of mine—and will seek thy deliverance."

Said Alberto : "I will go instantly, and I intrust myself to you."

And thus he departed and went unto the bishop. When he was arrived there and the bishop saw him, he instantly said with a stern face : "Who art thou?"

Alberto, stammering and trembling with fear, replied :

"I am Alberto, who was summoned to appear before you."

"Now I know thee," said the bishop. "Art thou not that Alberto who believest neither in God nor in the saints?"

Said Alberto : "My lord, whoever told you that spoke not the truth, for I believe in everything."

Then said the bishop : "And if thou believest in everything, then thou believest in the devil ; and this is sufficient for me to burn thee as a Patarin."

Alberto, almost out of his senses, prayed for mercy, but the bishop said : "Knowest thou thy Paternoster?"

Answered Alberto : "My lord, yes."

"Then say it instantly," commanded the Inquisitor. Alberto began ; but not according well the adjective with the substantive, he came stammering to an obscure passage, there where

¹Patarins were a religious sect and considered heretical.

²The Inquisitor and the Bishop were evidently one person, holding a double office.

it saith *da nobis hodie*, and beyond that he could not go. Then the Inquisitor, hearkening unto him, said :

"Alberto, I have heard thee ; whoever is a Patarin is not able to recite the holy prayers. Go now, and see that to-morrow morning thou returnest to me, and I will formulate the accusation according as thou deservest."

Said Alberto : "I will return to you, but I pray you that for the love of God ye will have mercy upon me !

Said the Inquisitor : "Get thee gone, and do that which I have told thee."

So he departed, and as he was returning unto his house he met with Messer Guccio Tolomei, who was going to the Inquisitor upon this same business.

Messer Guccio, beholding him returning, said : "Alberto, it must be well with thine affair, seeing thou returnest to thine house."

Replied Alberto : "Faith ! Not so ! For he declares I am a Patarin, and he bids me return unto him to-morrow morning, and assuredly it lacked but little, on account of that strumpet Donna Bisodia,¹ who is written down in the *Paternoster*, that he did not cause me to die upon the instant. Therefore, I pray you, for the love of God, that you will go unto him and beg of him to have mercy upon me."

Said Messer Guccio : "I will go there now, and will endeavour to do mine utmost for thy safety."

And thus Messer Guccio went on his way, and carrying unto the Inquisitor the history of Donna Bisodia, they made great laughter because of it for the space of two hours. And before Messer Guccio departed, the Inquisitor sent and called Alberto ; and when he was returned with great terror, the Inquisitor gave him to understand that if it had not been for Messer Guccio he would have burnt him. And well had he deserved the burning, because he had newly heard a worse thing, namely, that Alberto had called strumpet a holy

¹This is a play upon the words *da nobis hodie*, a joke arising out of Alberto's ignorance and mispronunciation of the Latin, which he took to be *dona-bishodie*—Donna Bisodia, the name of a woman.

woman, one Donna Bisodia, without whom they could never sing the Mass ; and he bade him depart and lead such a manner of life that he would no more be compelled to send for him. Alberto, crying for pity, answered that never would he say it any more ; and, all sorrowful because of the fear he had had, with Messer Guccio he returned unto his house. The which Messer Guccio, having conducted the matter according to his wish, a great while delighted in it in his thoughts, both without Alberto and with Alberto.

Curious are the inventions of gentlemen for making fools of quaint and simple persons, but more curious still was the opportunity which fortune discovered in Alberto being troubled by Donna Bisodia. And perchance, if Alberto had been a rich man, the Inquisitor would have caused him to be so troubled that he would have redeemed himself with his money from being burnt or crucified.

(II)

TWO GREAT AMBASSADORS

(Translated by M. G. STEEGMAN)

IN this tale will be shown how two ambassadors, although they had not much memory, through drinking good wine almost lost that little which they had. When Bishop Guido was lord over Arezzo, there were appointed for the Commune of the Casentino two ambassadors, to send unto him praying for certain things. And the commission of that which they were to say having been given unto them, one evening at a late hour they received the command to depart on the next morning. Wherefore, being returned that evening to their own house,

they made ready their sacks, and in the morning they departed upon the journey which had been commanded them. And when they had travelled several miles, one said unto the other : "Hast thou in mind the commission which was given unto us ?"

The other answered that he remembered nothing of it. Then said the first :

"Oh, but I relied upon thee !" and the other replied : "And I relied upon thee."

Then one looked at the other, saying :

"Assuredly we have done well ! Oh, what shall we do ?"

Then said the first : "See now, presently we shall come unto the inn where we shall eat, and there we will take counsel together, and it cannot happen but that our memory will return to us."

Replied the other : "Thou hast well said." And riding forward and dreaming the while, at the tierce they arrived at the inn where they were going to eat ; but although they gave all their thoughts unto the matter until the time when they sat down to dinner, they could not recall it unto their memories. And when they were gone to dinner and were seated at table, there was given them a very fine wine. The ambassadors, who were better pleased with the wine than if they had remembered their commission, began to look too deeply into their glasses ; they drank and caroused, and when they had finished dinner, not only did they forget their embassy, but they knew not where they were, and they laid them down to sleep. When they had slept for a while, they awoke all confused.

Said one unto the other : "Hast thou yet remembered our affair ?"

Answered the other : "I know nothing, I remember that our host's wine is the best wine that ever I drank, and since the time I had dinner I never awakened until now, and only this instant do I remember where I am."

Said his friend : "And I tell thee the same. Well, then, what shall we do ? What shall we say ?"

Then briefly spake the other : "Let us remain here all this

day, and to-night (thou knowest that night quickeneth the thoughts) it cannot be that we shall not remember the matter."

And they were agreed ; and here they stayed all that day, returning very often in their thoughts to the Tower of Vinacciano.¹ In the evening, when they were at supper, they made greater use of their glasses than of their platters, and when they had finished supper hardly could one understand the other. So they went to bed, and all the night they snored like pigs. In the morning, when they were arisen, one said :

"What shall we do ?"

The other made answer : "May an evil befall us, for seeing that this last night I remembered not a single thing, I do not think that I shall ever remember."

Said the first : "By the gospels, we are in a fair way ! For I know not what caused it, if it were that wine, or some other thing, but never did I sleep thus heavily, without being able to awaken, as I slept this last night in this inn."

"What the devil doth this mean ?" cried the other. "Let us mount our horses and depart, in God's name ! Perchance that when we are upon the road we shall remember."

And thus they departed, saying one unto the other as they rode : "Dost thou remember ?" And the other would reply : "No, not I !" "Neither do I !" In this manner they arrived at Arezzo and went unto the inn, where, although many times drawing each other apart into a chamber and thoughtfully resting their heads upon their hands, they were never able to remember their business. Then said one, almost in despair :

"Let us go. Heaven will help us !"

But the other said : "Oh, what shall we say, seeing that we know nothing ?"

The first answered : "The matter cannot stop here."

So they trusted to chance, and went unto the bishop. And being come unto the place where he was, they made reverence unto him, and there they remained, not knowing what they should do next. The bishop, like a man of high position, arose

¹"Tower of Grapes," a figure of speech, meaning "to drink deeply."

and advanced towards them, and taking them by the hand, he said :

“Ye are welcome, my sons ; what news do ye bring ?”

They looked one at the other, saying “Speak thou.” “No, speak thou,” and neither of them spoke. At last one said :

“Lord Bishop, we have been sent as ambassadors before your lordship by your servants of the Casentino, and they who sent us, and we who are sent, are but plain and simple men. And the commission was given unto us in the evening in haste, and—we know not how it happened, but either they did not rightly explain it unto us, or else we were not able to understand it. But we pray you most earnestly that the Commune and those men may be commended unto your protection,—and may sudden death fall upon those who sent us and upon us who came hither !”

The wise bishop placed his hands upon their shoulders, and said :

“Depart now, and say unto those my children, that it is my intention always to do everything that lieth within my power for their welfare. And in order that from now henceforth they may not have the expense of sending ambassadors, every time that they desire anything they shall write unto me, and I by letter will answer them.”

And when they had taken leave of the bishop they departed.

And as the ambassadors went upon their way, one said unto the other :

“Let us see that the same thing doth not happen upon our return journey as happened upon our coming hither.”

Said the other : “Oh, what have we now to remember !”

Replied the first : “Nevertheless, we must consider the matter, since we shall have to declare that which we laid before the bishop and the answer he made unto us. Because if our friends of the Casentino knew how that we had forgotten their commission, and that we returned to them as men having lost their memories, not only would they never more send us as ambassadors, but would never give us any other office either.”

Then said the other, who was more keen of wit : "Leave thou this case to me. I shall say that, immediately when we had laid our errand before the bishop, he graciously declared himself, in all and for all, ready to do every thing for their good ; and that, for his great love of them, he said, in order they should spend less money, that whenever they had need of him for their peace and comfort, they should write a simple letter and send no more ambassadors."

Said the first : "Thou hast well considered it ; now let us ride more quickly, that we may come early to the wine thou knowest of."

And thus, putting spurs to their horses, they arrived at the inn. And when the servant was come to hold their stirrups, they asked not to see the host, nor yet what they should have for dinner, but with the first word they asked what had become of that good wine.

The servant replied : "It is better than ever."

And here they fortified themselves this second time not less than the first ; and before they departed, because many drinkers were come in from the country round, the wine had given out and the cask had been taken away. The ambassadors, being mournful at this, took themselves away also, and came to those who had sent them on their journey, remembering better the lie they had invented than they had remembered the truth in the beginning, and relating that they had held a most fine discourse before the bishop, letting it be understood that one had been Tullius and the other Quintilianus. And they were greatly commended, and henceforth they held many offices, and most often were either syndics or stewards.

How often doth it happen, and not only to men of little importance like these, but to many far greater than they who are every day sent as ambassadors, that they have as much connection with events that happen as the Soldan hath with France. And they write and say that day and night they rest not, but always with great solicitude go about their affairs, and that everything is due unto their industry ; that they had

intervened at a moment most opportune, when really they had no more sense than a block of wood. And they are commended by those who sent them and are requited with high offices and other rewards. For this reason the greater number depart from the truth, especially when, having been believed, they perceive that they obtain a great advantage.



GIOVANNI FIORENTINO

(End of 14th Century)



A LOVE TEACHER

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

THE last story being thus happily brought to a conclusion, Saturnina in her turn began: "It has indeed pleased me much, especially when I consider the noble resolution of the lover, even while he held the long wished-for object of his affections, as it were, in his arms. Few, I fear, would have been capable of making such a sacrifice under similar circumstances : it is a truly moral and lofty example for his sex. It is nevertheless my intention, for the sake of variety, to follow it with one which I think will amuse you not a little, if it does nothing more.

"There were once two very intimate friends, both of the family of Savelli, in Rome, the name of one of whom was Bucciolo, of the other Pietro Paolo, both of good birth and easy circumstances. Expressing a mutual wish to study for a while together at Bologna, they took leave of their relatives, and set out. One of them attached himself to the study of the civil, the other to that of the canon law ; and thus they continued to apply themselves for some length of time. But, as you are aware that the subject of the Decretals takes a much narrower range than is embraced by the common law, so Bucciolo, who pursued the former, made greater progress than did Pietro Paolo ; and having taken a licentiate's degree, he began to think of returning to Rome.

" 'You see, my dear fellow student,' he observed to his friend Paolo, 'I am now a licentiate, and it is time for me to think of moving homewards !' 'Nay, not so,' replied his companion, 'I have to entreat you will not think of leaving me here this

winter ; stay for me till spring, and we can then return together. In the meanwhile you may pursue some other science, so that you need not lose any time' ; and to this Bucciolo at length consented, promising to await his relation's own good time. Having thus resolved, he had immediate recourse to his former tutor, informing him of his determination to bear his friend company a little longer, and entreating to be employed in some pleasant study, to beguile the period during which he had to remain. The professor begged him to suggest something he would like, as he should be very happy to assist him in its attainment. 'My worthy tutor,' replied Bucciolo, 'I think I should like to learn the way in which one falls in love, and the best manner to begin.' 'Oh, very good,' cried the tutor laughing ; 'you could have hit upon nothing better, for you must know that if that be your object, I am a complete adept in the art. To lose no time, in the first place, go next Sunday morning to the church of the Frati Minori, where all the ladies will be clustered together, and pay proper attention during service, in order to discover if any one of them in particular happen to please you. When you have done this, keep your eye upon her after service, to see the way she takes to her residence, and then come back to me. And let this be the first lesson, first part, of that in which it is my intention to instruct you.' Bucciolo went accordingly, and taking his station the next Sunday in the church, as he had been directed, his eyes wandering in every direction except the proper one, were fixed upon all the pretty women in the place, and upon one in particular who pleased him above all the rest. She was far the most attractive and beautiful lady he could find ; and on leaving the church, Bucciolo took care to obey his master, and follow her until he had made himself acquainted with her residence. Nor was it long before the young lady began to perceive that the student was smitten with her ; upon which, Bucciolo returning to his master, acquainted him with what he had done. 'I have learned as much as you ordered me, and found somebody I like very well.' 'So far, good,' cried the professor, not a little amused at the sort of science to which his

pupil thus seriously devoted himself, 'so far, good ; and now mind what I have next to say to you. Take care to walk two or three times a day very respectfully before her house, casting your eyes about you in such a way that no one catch you staring in her face ; but look in a modest and becoming manner, so that she cannot fail to perceive, and to be struck with it. And then return to me, and this, sir, will be the second lesson in this gay science.' So the scholar went, and promenaded with great discretion before the lady's door, who certainly observed that he appeared to be passing to and fro, out of respect to one of the inhabitants. This attracted her attention, for which Bucciolo very discreetly expressed his gratitude both by looks and bows, which being as often returned, the scholar began to be aware that the lady liked him. Upon this he immediately went and informed the professor of all that had passed, who replied : 'Come, you have done very well ; I am hitherto quite satisfied. It is now time for you to find some way of speaking to her, which you may easily do by means of one of those gipsies who haunt the streets of Bologna, crying ladies' veils, purses, and other rare articles to sell. Send word by her that you are the lady's most faithful devoted servant, and that there is no one in the world you so much wish to please. In short, let her urge your suit, and take care to bring the answer to me as soon as you have received it ; I will then tell you how you are to proceed.' Departing in all haste, he soon found a little old pedlar woman, quite perfect in her trade, to whom he said he should take it as a particular favour if she would do one thing, for which he would reward her handsomely. Upon this she declared her readiness to serve him in any thing he pleased, 'for you know,' she continued, 'it is my business to get money in every way I can.' Bucciolo gave her two florins, saying, 'I wish you to go as far as the Via Maccarella for me to day, where resides a young lady of the name of Giovanna, for whom I have the very highest regard. Pray tell her so, and recommend me to her most affectionately, so as to obtain for me her good graces by every means in your power. I entreat you to have my interest at

heart, and to say such pretty things as she cannot refuse to hear.' 'Oh,' said the little old woman, 'leave that to me, sir ; I will not fail to say a good word for you at the proper time.' 'Delay not,' said Bucciolo, 'but go now, and I will wait for you here' ; and she set off immediately, taking a basket of her trinkets under her arm. On approaching the place, she saw the lady before the door, enjoying the open air, and curtsying to her very low, 'Do I happen to have anything here you would fancy ?' she said, displaying her treasures. 'Pray, take something, madam, whatever pleases you best.' Veils, stays, purses and mirrors were now spread in the most tempting way before her eyes, as the old woman took her station at the lady's side. Out of all these, her attention appeared to be most attracted by a beautiful purse, which she observed, if she could afford, she should like to buy. 'Nay, madam, do not think any thing about the price,' exclaimed the little pedlar ; 'take any thing you please, for they are all paid for, I assure you.'

"Surprised at hearing this, and observing the very respectful manner of the speaker, the lady replied : 'Do you know what you are saying ? What do you mean by that ?' The old creature pretending now to be much affected, said : 'Well, madam, if it must be so, I will tell you. It is very true that a young gentleman of the name of Bucciolo sent me hither, one who loves you better than all the world besides. There is nothing he would not do to please you, and indeed he appears so very wretched because he cannot speak to you, and he is so very good, that it is quite a pity. I think it will be the death of him ; and then he is such a fine, such an elegant young man ; the more is the pity.' On hearing this, the lady, blushing deeply, turned sharply round upon the little old hag, exclaiming : 'Oh, you wicked little creature ; were it not for the sake of my own reputation, I would give you such a lesson that you should remember it to the latest day of your life. A pretty story to come before decent people with ! Are not you ashamed of yourself to let such words come out of your mouth ?' Then seizing an iron bar that lay across the doorway, 'Ill betide you, little wretch,' she cried, as she brand-

ished it, 'if you ever return this way again, you may depend upon it you will never go back alive.' The trembling old creature, quickly bundling up her pack, ran off, in dread of feeling that cruel weapon on her shoulders ; nor did she once think of stopping till she had reached the place where Signor Bucciolo stood. Eagerly inquiring the news, and in what way she had prospered ; 'Oh, very badly, very badly, answered the little gipsy, 'I never was in such a fright in all my life. Why, she will neither see nor listen to you, and if I had not run away, I should have felt the weight of her hand upon my shoulders. For my own part, I shall go there no more,' chinking the two florins ; 'and I would advise you to look to yourself how you proceed in such affairs in future.' Poor Bucciolo now became quite disconsolate, and returned in all haste to acquaint the professor with this unlucky result. But the tutor, not a whit cast down, consoled him, saying : 'Do not despair, Bucciolo ; a tree is not levelled at a single stroke, you know. I think you must have a repetition of your lesson to-night. So go and walk before her door as usual, notice how she eyes you, and whether she appears angry or not ; and then come back again to me.' He proceeded without delay to the lady's house, who the moment she perceived him called her maid, giving her directions as follows : 'Quick, quick ; hasten after that young man ; that is he ; and tell him from me that he must come and speak to me this evening without fail ; yes, without fail.' The girl soon came up with Bucciolo : 'My lady, sir, my lady Giovanna would be glad of the pleasure of your company this evening ; she would be very glad to speak to you.' Greatly surprised at this Bucciolo replied : 'Tell your lady I shall be most happy to wait upon her' ; and turning round, he set off once more to the professor, and reported the progress of the case. But this time his master looked a little more serious, for, from some trivial circumstances put together, he began to entertain suspicions that the lady was no other than his own wife. So he rather anxiously inquired of Bucciolo whether he intended to accept the invitation. 'To be sure I do,' replied his pupil. 'Then promise,' rejoined the

professor, 'that you will come here before you set off.' 'Certainly,' said Bucciolo, 'I will' ; and he took his leave.

"Now our hero was far from suspecting that the lady boasted so near a relationship to his beloved tutor, although the latter began to feel rather uneasy as to the result, feeling certain twinges of jealousy by no means pleasant. For he passed most of his winter evenings at the college, where he gave lectures, and not unfrequently remained there for the night. I should be sorry, thought he, that this young gentleman were learning these things at my expense ; and I must therefore know the real state of the case. In the evening his pupil called again, saying : 'Worthy sir, I am now ready to go.' 'Well go,' replied the professor ; 'but be wise, Signor Bucciolo, be wise : think more than once what you are about.' 'Trust me for that,' replied the scholar, a little piqued, 'I shall go well provided, and not walk like a fool into the mouth of danger unarmed.' And away he went, furnished with a good cuirass, a rapier, and a stiletto in his belt. He was no sooner on his way than the professor slipped out quietly after him, following him close at his heels, and truly he saw him stop at his own door, which, on a pretty smart tap being given, was opened in a moment, and the pupil was admitted by the lady herself. When the professor saw that it was indeed his own wife, he was quite overwhelmed, saying in a faint voice to himself : 'Alas ! I fear this young fellow has learned more than he confesses, at my expense' ; and making a cruel vow to revenge himself, he ran back to the college, where, arming himself with sword and knife, he hastened back in a terrible passion, with the intention of wreaking his vengeance on poor Bucciolo without delay. Arriving at his own door, he gave a pretty smart knock, which the lady, sitting before the fire with Bucciolo, instantly recognized for her husband's. So taking hold of Bucciolo, she concealed him in all haste, under a heap of damp clothes, lying on a table near the window, ready for ironing ; and this done, she ran to the door, and inquired who was there. 'Open, quick,' returned the professor, 'you vile woman, you shall soon know who I am.' On opening the door, she beheld

him with a drawn sword, and exclaimed, : ‘Oh, my dearest life ! what means this ?’ ‘You know very well,’ said he, ‘what it means ; the villain is now in the house.’ ‘Good heavens, what is it you say ?’ cried his wife, ‘are you gone out of your wits ? Come and search the house, and if you find any body, I will give you leave to kill me on the spot. What, do you think I should now begin to misconduct myself as I never before did, as none of my family ever did before ? Beware, lest the evil one should be tempting you, and suddenly depriving you of your sense, drive you to perdition.’

“But the professor calling out for candles, began to search the house, from the cellars upwards, among the tubs and casks, in every place but the right one, running his sword through the beds and under the beds, and into every inch of the bedding, leaving no corner or crevice of the whole house untouched. The lady accompanied him with a candle in her hand, frequently interrupting him with, ‘Say your beads, say your beads, good sir ; it is certain that the evil one is dealing with you ; for were I half so bad as you esteem me, I would kill myself with my own hands. But I entreat you not to give way to his evil suggestions ; oppose the adversary while you can.’

“Hearing these virtuous asseverations of his wife, and not being able to meet with any one after the strictest search, the professor began to think that he must indeed be possessed, and in a short time, extinguishing the lights, returned to his rooms. The lady, shutting the door upon him, called out to Bucciolo to come from his hiding place, and stirring the fire, began to prepare a fine capon for supper, with some delicious wines and fruits. And thus they regaled themselves, highly entertained with each other ; nor was it their least satisfaction that the professor had just left them, apparently convinced that they had learned nothing at his expense.

“Proceeding the next morning to college, Bucciolo, without the least suspicion of the truth, informed his master that he had something for his ear which he was sure would make him laugh. ‘How, how so !’ exclaimed the professor. ‘Why,’ re-

turned his pupil, 'you must know that last night, just as the very time I was in the lady's house, who should come in but her husband, and in such a rage ! He searched the whole house from top to bottom, without being able to find me. I lay under a heap of newly washed clothes, which were not half dry. In short the lady played her part so well, that the poor gentleman forthwith took his leave, and we afterwards eat a fine fat capon for supper, and drank such wines, and with such a zest ! It was really one of the pleasantest evenings I ever spent in my life. But I think I will go and take a nap, for I promised to return again this afternoon about the same hour.'—'Then be sure before you go,' said the professor, trembling with suppressed rage, 'be sure to tell me when you set off.'—'Oh, certainly,' replied Bucciolo, and away he went. Such was now the unhappy tutor's condition as to render him incapable of delivering a single lecture during the whole day ; and such his extreme vexation and desire to behold the evening that he spent the whole time in arming himself cruelly, with rapier, sword, and cuirass, dwelling only upon deeds of blood. At the appointed hour came Bucciolo, with the utmost innocence, saying, 'My dear tutor, I am going now.'—'Yes, go,' replied the professor, 'and come back again to-morrow morning, if you can, to tell me how you have fared.'—'I intend to do so,' said Bucciolo, and departed at a brisk pace for the house of the lady. Armed cap-a-pie, the professor ran out after him, keeping pretty close at his heels, with the intention of catching him just as he entered. But the lady being on the watch opened the door so quickly for the pupil that she shut it in the master's face, who began to knock and to call out with a furious noise. Extinguishing the candle in a moment, the lady placed Bucciolo behind the door, and throwing her arms round her husband's neck as he entered, motioned to her lover, while she thus held his enemy, to make his escape ; and he, upon the husband rushing forwards, stepped out from behind the door unperceived. She then began to scream as loud as she could, 'Help, help, the professor is run mad ! Will nobody help me ? for he was in an

ungovernable rage, and she clung faster to him than before. The neighbours running to her assistance, and seeing the peaceable professor thus armed with all these deadly weapons, and his wife crying out, 'Help, for the love of heaven ; too much study hath driven him mad !' they really believed such to be the fact. 'Come, good master,' they said, 'what is all this ? Try to compose yourself ; nay, do not struggle so hard, but let us help you to your couch,' 'How can I rest, think you,' he replied, 'while this wicked woman harbours par-amours in my house ? I saw him come in with my own eyes.'—'Wretch that I am,' cried his wife, 'inquire of all my friends and neighbours whether any one of them ever saw any thing the least unbecoming in my conduct ?' The whole party, with one voice, entreated the master to lay such thoughts aside, for that there was not a better lady breathing, nor one who set a higher value upon her reputation.—'But how can that be,' said the tutor, 'when I saw him enter the house with my own eyes ? and he is in it now.' In the meanwhile the lady's two brothers arrived, when she began to weep bitterly, exclaiming, 'Oh, my dear brothers, my poor husband is gone mad, quite mad ; and he even says there is a man in the house ! I believe he would kill me if he could ; but you know me too well to listen a moment to such a story' ; and she continued to weep. The brothers forthwith accosted the professor in no very gentle terms : 'We are surprised, we are shocked, sir, to find that you dare bestow such epithets on our sister ; what can have led you, after living so amicably together, to bring these charges against her now ?'—'I can only tell you,' replied the enraged professor, 'that there is a man in the house ; I saw him.'—'Then come and let us find him ; shew him to us, for we will sift this matter to the bottom,' retorted the incensed brothers. 'Shew us the man, and we will then punish her in such a way as will satisfy you !'

"One of them taking his sister aside, said, 'First tell me, have you really got any one hidden in the house ? Tell the truth !'—'Heavens !' cried his sister, 'I tell you I would rather suffer death. Should I be the first to bring a scandal on our house ?'

I wonder you are not ashamed to mention such a thing.' Rejoiced to hear this, the brothers, directed by the professor, immediately commenced a search. Half frantic, he led them directly to the great bundle of linen, which he pierced through and through with his sword, firmly believing he was killing Bucciolo all the while, taunting him at the same time at every blow. 'There, I told you,' cried his wife, 'he was quite mad ; to think of destroying his own property thus ! It is plain he did not help to get them up,' she continued, whimpering ; 'all my best clothes.' Having now sought everywhere in vain, one of the brothers observed, 'He is indeed mad' ; to which the other agreed, while he again attacked the professor in the bitterest terms. 'You have carried things too far, sir ; your conduct to our sister is shameful, nothing but insanity can excuse it.' Vexed enough before, the professor upon this flew into a violent passion, and brandished his naked sword in such a way that the others were obliged to use their sticks, which they did so very effectually that, after breaking them over his back, they chained him down, like a madman, upon the floor, declaring he had lost his wits by excessive study ; and taking possession of his house, they remained with their sister the whole night. The next morning they sent for a physician, who ordered a couch to be placed as near as possible to the fire ;¹ that no one should be allowed to speak or reply to the patient ; and that he should be strictly dieted until he recovered his wits ; and this regimen was diligently enforced.

"A report immediately spread throughout Bologna that the good professor had become insane, which caused very general regret, his friends observing to each other, 'It is indeed a bad business, but I suspected yesterday how it was : he could scarcely get a word out as he was delivering his lecture ; did you perceive ?'—'Yes, I saw him change colour, poor fellow ;' and everywhere, by every body, it was decided that the professor was mad. In this situation numbers of his scholars went

¹This manner of treating their crazy patients in a high fever must give our modern physicians a strange notion of the tactics of their ancient brethren, and a good opinion of themselves.

to see him, and among the rest Bucciolo, knowing nothing of what had passed, agreed to accompany them to the college, desirous of acquainting his master with his last night's exploit. What was his surprise to learn that he had actually taken leave of his senses ; and being directed, on leaving the college, to the professor's house, he was almost panic struck on approaching the place, beginning to comprehend the whole affair. Yet in order that no one might be led to suspect the real truth, he walked into the house along with the rest, and on reaching a certain apartment which he knew, he beheld his poor tutor, almost beaten to a mummy, and chained down upon his bed, close to the fire. His pupils were standing round, condoling with him, and lamenting his piteous case. At length it came to Bucciolo's turn to say something to him, which he did, as follows : 'My dear master, I am as truly concerned for you as if you were my own father ; and if there is any thing in which I can be of use to you, command me as your own son.' To this the poor professor only replied, 'No, Bucciolo ; depart in peace, my pupil, depart, for you have learned much, very much at my expense.' Here his wife interrupted him : 'You see how he wanders, heed not what he says ; pay no attention to him, Signor.' Bucciolo, however, prepared to depart, and taking a hasty leave of the professor, he ran to the lodgings of his relation, Pietro Paolo, saying, 'Fare you well ! God bless you, my friend ! I must away to Rome ; for I have lately learned so much, at other people's expense, that I am going home' ; and he hurried away, and fortunately arrived safely at Rome."

SABATINO DEGLI ARIENTI
(Second half of the 15th Century)



LOVE AND DEATH

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

“THE following story, my dear lord and patron, and you, his very noble guests, will be found to belong to the period when our valiant countrymen triumphed, near the bridge of San Ambrosio, over the troops of Encio, King of Sardinia, son of the emperor Frederic II., whose bones, as a token of our victory, are still lying, graced with a becoming epitaph, in the church of our good Frati Predicatori. The subject of the unhappy adventure which occurred about the time we speak of was one of our young fellow-citizens of the name of Malatesta, son of Alberto de' Carbonesi, sprung from an ancient and noble family, of which our excellent friend now living in our city, likewise Alberto by name, is a descendant.

“From his infant years, the young Malatesta had attached himself to the society of a sweet young girl, daughter of Messer Paolo Galuzzi, a noble cavalier, named Lelia. Their youthful companionship at length ripened into warmer feelings, and her lover soon became an object of idolatry in the eyes of the fair maiden, who, from his fascinating manners and accomplishments, had been already prevailed upon to pledge her troth, on condition of obtaining her parents' consent, to yield him her willing hand. Enraptured with his success, the glow-

ing youth imagined that every other difficulty must soon give way, and that he might hope soon to enjoy the supreme happiness of possessing the charming and long-loved Lelia for his wife. But his anguish and disappointment were extreme when he found her father persisted in the refusal of his hand and of his visits. Although this was a severe blow, he resolved to die sooner than to relinquish the object he had in view. To further his purpose, he had instant recourse to the favourite maid of the beloved girl ; vowing to make the prize his own before the father had time to bestow her beauties upon another. Having obtained the confidence of her maid Lisetta, he scaled the gardens, and approaching the chamber of the lady at the dead of night, with the girl's assistance he awoke her, and had the delight of beholding at the balcony that form which from a very boy he had always loved. He gazed upon her, while rapture, for a moment, impeded his utterance; but the next, he seized her white hands in his, and was at her side. 'Forgive me, but I come to put an end, my own Lelia, to our long unpitied anguish and deep sufferings. Let our present joy and happiness obliterate them for ever ! Only consent to be mine ! A priest is ready to bind our hands.' Mingled emotions of joy and shame shook the bosom of the gentle girl as he spoke, and her tears fell upon his hands, as she answered him with a faltering voice, 'Alas ! alas ! what can I do ? My father ! my poor father ! Yet he would give me to another.' Malatesta, whose eyes had been long riveted in silence upon the surpassing grace and loveliness of her charms, thus expressed the emotions of his heart : 'You are all, my beautiful Lelia, that my fondest hopes and wishes would have you to be ; and you know that from the earliest time I can recollect your goodness, your exceeding beauty, and the sweetness of your voice and language have made me, far beyond your noble birth, ever desirous of serving and obliging you. Indeed I am incessantly studying to that end, and though your father thinks me too bold and aspiring, as truly I fear I am, and all unworthy to possess so much excellence, it is still unjust and unwise in him to slight your wishes, and to

forbid you to become my own sweet wife. Nor in so acting does he fairly appreciate the value of my ancient name and my possessions, much less the inexpressible love I bear you. You are aware what innumerable suitors have aspired to the bliss of calling you theirs, and yet not one has had the fortune to succeed, as if your father's displeasure were to become the cause of your unhappiness, consuming the morning of your beauty in solitude, while it had been far more wise and honourable to bestow you in the bloom of your young affections upon him who deserves you best. It is this which has now brought me to your feet, to combat such opinions, in every way so unworthy of your father, who, not satisfied with debarring you from the indulgence of your affections for the object of your regard, would exclude and destroy them altogether. Against all reason, love, and the laws of society, he in fact tells you that you shall not wed. Most meekly, with a full heart, I conjure you not to confirm such ungenerous views. But come with me, my own love, and be the most cherished and honoured creature that ever blest a husband's choice. Look up, then, my Lelia ; tell me you will be mine, and, believe me, your friends will not only soon be reconciled, but rejoiced to hear of the event.' Deep drawn sighs, half love, half grief, were, for a long time, the only answer she could give, till at length a burst of tenderness and sorrow was audible. 'You have been to me,' she said, 'always a companion and friend, whom I loved beyond everything else in the world, and I know the words you speak are as sweet as they ever were, and as true. Take me then, my lord and husband, for your worth, your virtues, and kind manners have made me, alas ! too indifferent to everything else in the world. And now be happy and doubt no more, dear Malatesta ; I will follow you though death should be my portion, wherever you please, rejoicing in my sufferings, as long as we preserve unshaken our tried and faithful love.' On these words he instantly led her away, and placing a rich diamond upon her finger, he espoused her before the holy man, who had been in readiness to receive them.

“When he had borne her, with the utmost difficulty, from the paternal mansion, and was preparing to enter his own, his fair bride turning towards the servant who had accompanied them, said, ‘Tell my parents that I am now the wife of the noblest youth our city can boast, Malatesta Carbonese, who ever honoured and loved me.’ Her maid, Lisetta, not without shedding tears at parting, thus replied : ‘Ah, my dear young mistress, beware how you do or say any thing that may wound the pride of your family, for I fear, I sadly fear’—‘Fear nothing, but return, and answer only to such questions as may be required of you, if you are fearful of your own safety ; nay, do not weep for me, Lisetta, and farewell.’ The grateful and happy lover then conducted his fair bride into her new dwelling, intending on the following day to employ the interest of all his friends to obtain a speedy reconciliation with her family. Early on the following day, Donna Erminia, the young lady’s mother, inquiring for her daughter, was informed by her maid Lisetta, as she had been directed, that she had become the wedded wife of Malatesta Carbonese on the previous evening. In the utmost anger and alarm the lady immediately ran into her husband’s chamber, crying, ‘Oh, Messer Paolo, we are lost, we are dishonoured : Lelia has eloped this very night with Malatesta Carbonese, into whose house she has been carried.’ In an impulse of rage and grief, far exceeding that of his wife, Messer Paolo instantly rose and armed himself, crying in a loud voice for his servants and his sons. Accompanied by these, he hastened to the house of Alberto Carbonese, at a short distance from his own, with purposes of the most deadly revenge. On breaking into the place, the first object they met was a female servant, whom they instantly sacrificed to their fury. But fortunately for Alberto and two of his sons, they had set out two days before for a country seat at Ronzano, where the estates of the family lay. Finding none of the inmates in the lower rooms, the enraged brothers immediately proceeded to search the chambers, and soon arriving at one which seemed to resist their efforts, they furiously burst it open, and rushed upon the

defenceless lovers, who vainly sought to shelter each other from their impending fate. Awed by their sister's piercing cries, they stood a moment, nor ventured to stab him in her arms. But binding his throat and face with their fierce hands, they smothered him as he lay on the bridal couch, their equally savage father having dragged the poor girl out of the chamber while the deed was done. He then drew her back by her fair hair into the fatal room, exclaiming, 'There ! Go take thy pleasure now, infamous wretch as thou art ! thou hast given me a revenge in which I shall always exult.' They then closed the door, and hastened from the house. The weeping Lelia having raised herself with difficulty, in the agony of her despair cast her eyes upon the couch, and beheld the discoloured and deathlike features of her beloved. She threw herself upon the body, unconscious for a long time of her existence, but when she recovered from her swoon as from a deep slumber, in which she had forgotten what had passed, surprise and terror overwhelmed her with redoubled force, and she felt how much easier it would be to die than to recover from another such attack, into which she was very nearly relapsing. Unable longer to contend with her emotions, she again threw her arms around her husband's neck, and kissing him tenderly, exclaimed, 'Alas ! alas ! and hast thou so soon left me ? Whither is thy sweet spirit fled ? May heaven's pity be denied to those who have so basely robbed me of the dear companion of my days ! And art thou gone without thy Lelia ? Oh treacherous friends ! no longer friends or relations of mine ! Speak, speak to me, my love ; breathe again the soft words you lately breathed into mine ear, promising me never, never more to part. Oh, dear, unhappy scene of all our bliss and woe ! How soon has our supreme delight turned into bitter tears and pain, ourselves preparing the means for our cruel enemies to wreak their sad revenge ? Ah, that they had first sacrificed me to their fury, and saved me from what I now feel ! Oh, savage father, and more savage brothers ! you will live to regret your cruelty when you behold the Lelia once so dear to you stretched lifeless

before your eyes. Would to heaven, I had never consented, my love, to yield to thy honeyed words ! Then I had still gazed on thee, still heard thy voice, nor been the wretch I now am. But why these vain tears and grief ? It is very weak and unworthy to indulge them, when I can follow thee, my husband, and free my burthened spirit from the load it bears. Shall I shew myself unequal to the many bright examples of love, even unto death ? No, I will die the death he died, cruel as it is. I promised to follow him to the last.'

"Saying these words, she provided herself with the very same means of destruction as had proved fatal to her unfortunate lover, exclaiming, in the agony of her grief, 'Cruel father, and still more savage brothers, may you live long and wretchedly after my death ! May heaven deal out to you only the pity you have shewn !' And then once more invoking the name of her beloved husband, she launched herself into eternity ; and the fair form was soon all that remained of so much loveliness and truth.

"A crowd had gradually assembled round the mansion of Alberto, after observing the furious departure of Messer Paolo and his people, and suspecting some fatal occurrence had taken place, no answer being returned to their repeated calls, several individuals made their way into the house. The first object they beheld was the murdered servant ; but they were far more horror-struck on advancing further, to find the beautiful form of Lelia hanging lifeless on her bridal couch. Exclamations of grief and indignation burst from all around ; nor was it long before the grievous tidings reached the ears of the father and friends of the unhappy youth. Hastening back with his other sons to Bologna, such was the impression produced by their representations and appearance that the whole city rose, and the followers of both powerful families coming to action, Messer Paolo, the young bride's father, was compelled to save himself, with his son Egano, by flight, while his other two sons were taken and executed according to the laws, a decree of exile being awarded against the rest of the family.

“The remains of the unhappy lovers, wedded thus in death, were then consigned to the earth, not without the lamentation of the people, in the church of San Giacomo, where a noble monument was raised to their memory, bearing the following inscription :

Chi s'amó più che la sua vita in terra,
Gli nervi e l'ossa sue qui dentro serra.



ANTONIO MANETTI [?]

(1423-1497)



GRASSO THE CARPENTER

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

ABOUT the year 1409, a company of young Florentines having met one Sunday evening, as usual, to sup together at the house of their friend, Tommaso de' Pecori, a very good natured and respectable man and fond of good society, the whole party, as soon as they had supped, drew their chairs sociably round the fire. There, as is usual on such occasions, they began to converse in a pleasant way upon a variety of topics, when one of the guests looking round him, observed, "What can be the reason that we have not the company of Manetto Ammanatini here to-night?" Now Manetto was by profession a carver in hard woods, who had opened a shop in the Piazza San Giovanni, and was considered a very skilful artist in his way; he possessed a very agreeable person and manners, and was about twenty-eight years of age. Indeed such was his comely and comfortable appearance, that it had acquired for him the name of Grasso, Fat, and he was everywhere esteemed one of the most happy, good-tempered fellows in the world, always contributing his full share to the life and spirit of a feast. But this time, either from design or caprice, the ingenious carver was wanting to complete the social comfort of the party. After discussing the matter over and over, they were still at a loss to imagine the reason of his absence. As he had sent no message, they felt a little piqued at it; and the person who had first started the subject said, "I wish we could play him some good trick, were it only to teach him

better manners in future." "Yes, but what kind of trick could we play him?" said another; "unless, indeed, we could get him to treat us to a dinner, or something of the kind." Now there was a certain Philip Brunellesco belonging to the same party, a man well acquainted with Grasso and all his concerns, who, on hearing this, began to ponder a little on the subject. And pondering to some purpose, he at length observed, like a clever fellow as he was, "If I thought, gentlemen, I were wicked enough to do it, I could tell you how we might have a noble revenge: oh, such a revenge! by passing off a trick upon him that will make us all laugh for an age to come: what do you think? I have not the least doubt we might persuade him that he was actually metamorphosed, and become quite another person." "Nay, that is impossible!" they all cried at once. "I say not," continued Philip, "if you will only listen, and let me explain the whole plan." And this he did in so satisfactory a manner, that they one and all agreed to join him in persuading Grasso that he was changed into Matteo, a member of the same party.

The ensuing night was accordingly fixed upon for the transformation; when Philip, as being upon the most intimate terms with Grasso, was appointed to go, about the time of shutting up shop, to visit him. So he went; and after talking with Grasso, as had been agreed upon, for some time, there appeared a little lad running in great haste, who inquired if Signor Brunellesco were there? Philip answered, he was, and begged to know what he wanted. "Oh, signor," said the boy, "you must come immediately; for your mother has met with a sad accident, she is very nearly killed, so you must come home now." With well feigned grief and alarm, Philip exclaimed, "Good Lord defend us!" and took leave somewhat abruptly of his friend Grasso, who said he would go with him if he thought he could be of any service; for now was the time to shew his regard. Philip thanked him saying, "No, not now; but if I want you, I will make bold to send for you." Then pretending to hasten homewards, Philip turned the corner of a street, leading to Grasso's house, opposite to

Santa Reparata, and very unceremoniously picking the lock of the door, he marched in, and fastened it behind him, so that no one could follow.

Now it happened that Grasso's mother had set off some days before to a little country place at Polerossa, for the purpose of washing linen and such household concerns, and she was expected back again any day. After shutting up his shop, Grasso went sauntering along the Piazza ruminating on his friend's misfortune ; until, finding that it grew late, he concluded that Philip would hardly think of sending for him that night. So he resolved to go home, but was somewhat puzzled, on ascending the steps, to find that he could not open the door as usual ; and after several vain attempts, he supposed it must be locked in the inside, and knocking pretty sharply, he shouted, "Open the door !" thinking that his mother had returned, and for some reason or other had fastened it after her in the inside. But at length a voice answered, in Grasso's own tone, "Who is there ?" and Grasso, a little startled, said, "It is I ; let me in." "No," returned the voice ; "and I beg, Matteo, that you will go away : I am in great anxiety about a friend of mine ; for as I was just now talking in my shop to Philip, there came a messenger in haste to say that his mother was nearly dead, and I am very sorry for him." Philip pretended all the while he said this to take poor Grasso for his friend Matteo ; and then, as if turning to Grasso's mother, he continued, "Pray, good mother, let me have my supper ; it is really too bad ; you ought to have been back two days since, and you come in just at this time of night,"—and he went on grumbling and scolding exactly in Grasso's own voice. Still more surprised at this, Grasso now said, "That is very like my own voice ; what the deuce can it all mean ? Who is it, speaking there up stairs ? can it be I ? How is it, I wonder ? he says Philip was at his shop when he heard his mother was ill, and now he is busy chiding his mother, or my mother Giovanna, I do not know which. Have I lost my senses, or what does it mean ?" Then he went down the steps again, and shouted up at the windows, when, as had been agreed upon

there passed by his friend Donatello, the sculptor, who said as he went past, "Good night, Matteo, good night ; I am going to call upon your friend Grasso, he is just gone home." Grasso was now perfectly bewildered, on hearing his friend Donatello address him as Matteo ; and turning away, he went into the Piazza San Giovanni, saying to himself, "I will stay here, till somebody comes by who can tell me who I really am." He was next met by some officers of police, a bailiff, and a creditor, to whom Matteo owed a sum of money. "This is the man ; this is Matteo, take him, he is my debtor, I have watched him closely, and caught him at last !" cried the creditor ; and the officers, laying hands on him, led him away. It was in vain that Grasso, turning towards the creditor exclaimed, "Why, what have you to do with me ? you have mistaken your man ! my name is Grasso the Carver ; I am not Matteo, nor any of his kin : I do not even know him." And he was beginning to lay about him lustily ; but they soon secured him, and held him fast. "You not Matteo ?" cried his creditor, surveying him from head to foot, "we shall soon see that. Do you think I do not know my own debtor Matteo ? Cannot I distinguish him from Grasso the Carver, think you ? You have been in my books too long. I have had accounts against you this year past : yet you have the impudence to tell me you are not Matteo ; but will such an alias, think you, pay me my money back ? Off with him : we shall soon see whether he be Matteo or not." They then hurried him to prison, and it being supper-time, they encountered no one on the road. His name was entered in the gaol-book as Matteo, and he was compelled to take up his station with the rest of the prisoners, all of whom hailed him in the same tone, saying, "Good night, Matteo, good night !" Hearing himself thus addressed, Grasso said, "There must be something in it certainly ; what can it mean !" and he almost began to persuade himself that, as everybody said so, he must indeed be Matteo. "Will you come and take some supper with us," said the prisoners, "and put off thinking of your case till to-morrow ?" So Grasso supped with them, and took up his

quarters along with one of them, who observed, "Now, Matteo, make yourself as comfortable as you can to-night, and to-morrow, if you can pay, well and good ; but, if not, you must send home for bed-clothes." Grasso, thanking him, laid himself down to rest, thinking what would become of him, if he were really changed into Matteo ; "which I fear," he continued, "must in some way be the case ; there are so many proofs of it on all sides. Suppose I send home to my mother ; but then if Grasso be really in the house, they will only laugh at me, and perhaps say I am mad. And yet surely I must be Grasso." And with such cogitations he lay perplexing himself all night, not able to determine which of the two he was. After a sleepless night he arose, and stationed himself at the small grated window, in hopes some one might pass who knew him ; and, as chance would have it, Giovanni Rucellai, one of the supper party when the plot was first hatched, approached. It happened that Grasso was making a dressing table for Giovanni, intended for a lady, and the latter had been in his shop the day before, pressing him to finish the work in a few days at farthest. Giovanni, going into a shop facing the prison gate, on the ground-floor where Grasso stood, the prisoner began to smile and make mouths at him ; but his friend only stared at him, as if he had never seen him in his life before. Grasso, thinking the other did not know him, said, "Pray, do you happen to know a person of the name of Grasso, who lives at the back of the Piazza San Giovanni, and makes inlaid work ?" "Know him ! to be sure I do," replied Giovanni, "very well ; he is a particular friend of mine, and I am going to him directly about a little job he has in hand for me." "Then," said Grasso, "as you are going, pray be so good as just to say to him, 'A very particular acquaintance of yours, Grasso, has been taken into custody, and would be glad to exchange a word with you !'" "To be sure I will," said the other, "very willingly" ; and, taking his leave, pursued his way. Friend Grasso, remaining at the window of the prison, began to commune with himself, "Well, at last, it is clear that I am no longer Grasso, for I am Matteo.

But what a wretched fate is mine ! If I say a word about the matter, they will think me mad, and the very lads will laugh at me ; and if I fail to explain it, a thousand mistakes will occur, like that of yesterday, when I was arrested for him, so that I am in a most awkward dilemma. Well, I must wait for Grasso's arrival, and see what he says when I explain the affair to him." After anxiously looking out for his arrival, during many hours in vain, he at length retired from his station, to make room for other prisoners who wished to look out. Now it happened that a certain learned judge had that day been committed to prison for debt, who, though unacquainted with Grasso, observing his forlorn situation, and supposing he must be an unhappy debtor, sought to encourage him, saying, "Why, Matteo, you look as melancholy as if you were going to be executed to-morrow, and yet you are only confined for a trifling debt. Come, you ought not to despair ; but send for some of your friends or relatives, and try to accommodate matters, so that you may shortly get out, instead of fretting yourself to death." Hearing these consolatory words, Grasso resolved to confide the source of his grievance to so kind an adviser, and, drawing him aside, he said, "Though you do not seem to know me, I am well acquainted with you, signor, and the reputation you have acquired. It is this that emboldens me to entrust you with the source of my unhappiness, lest you should imagine that any small debt could produce the agitation in which you saw me. Alas ! it is far worse" ; and he then proceeded to relate the whole of his adventure, bitterly lamenting, and entreating of him two things, namely, that he would mention it to no other person, and that he would deign to give him some advice as to the course he ought to pursue, adding, "As I know you to be deeply read in those authors who treat of ancient histories and of every kind of strange events, have you ever met with any case similar to this ? The worthy judge, having heard him out, came at once to the conclusion that the poor man was either insane or the dupe of some trick, such as it really was. He therefore replied that he had read of many instances of

persons being changed in this way, and that it was no new thing. "Then," said Grasso, "pray tell me, in case I am become Matteo, what has happened of Matteo now?" The judge replied, "Of course, he must have become Grasso." The latter rejoined, "Well, I should at least wish to see him, out of curiosity." In this way they continued conversing together until near the hour of vespers, when Matteo's two brothers made their appearance, and inquired of the prison registrar whether a brother of theirs named Matteo was confined there for debt, and to what amount? This man, happening to be a particular friend of Tommaso de' Pecori, had been let into the secret, and answered that there was; then pretending to run over a list of names, he added the amount of the sum, along with the creditor's name. "Well," said the brothers, "we wish to speak with him instantly, and fix upon some method of payment." So entering into the prison, they inquired of a man, whom they saw standing at the window, whether one Matteo was near at hand, begging him to tell him that two of his brothers were come to ransom him, if he would appear. Soon after Grasso made his appearance at the grate, and having saluted them, the eldest of the brothers said, "Ah, Matteo, and has all the advice we have given you gone for nothing? how often we have warned you what would be the result, plunging every day deeper and deeper into debt, while your extravagance never admits of your paying any one! What with gambling, and other evil courses, you have never a farthing in the world that you can call your own; and now you reap the fruits of such conduct. Do you think we have not already been involved in sufficient trouble and expense, without adding this to the list of your former follies and extravagances? Let me tell you, that were it not in consideration of our own honour, and the anxiety of our mother, we would leave you here to pay the penalty of your sins, in order that you might learn better for the future. As it is, we have determined to give you one more trial, and pay the amount; warning you, at the same time, that should you repeat the offence you shall lie and rot here, before we

will trouble ourselves with you more. Be ready, then, when we call for you about vesper time, when there will be fewer people abroad ; as it is not very pleasant to be seen here every day in consequence of your scandalous proceedings." To this rebuke Grasso replied with the utmost humility, promising to abandon the course he had pursued, and no longer bring disgrace upon his friends by his extravagance. He then entreated that they would be true to the hour, which they said they would observe, and took leave of him.

Grasso then went back, and thus addressed the judge, "Well, this is strange indeed ! Matteo's brothers have just been here to inform me they will come and release me in the evening. But," he continued, very much puzzled, "when they take me hence, where shall I go ? certainly not to my own house, because if Grasso lives there, what can I say ? he will assuredly believe me mad ; for I am sure he must be there, or my mother would have sent before this to say that I was missing, whereas she now thinks I am at home." The judge replied, "Then do not go there, but accompany your brothers (I mean those who called) wherever they please." Thus conversing, evening at length arrived ; the brothers made their appearance, pretending that they had accommodated the affair ; the gaoler came forward with the prison keys, and, stepping up to the place, said, "Which of you is Matteo ?" Grasso, presenting himself, replied, "I am here." The gaoler, narrowly observing him, said, "Your brothers have settled your debt ; so go, you are free," at the same time opening the prison door for Grasso and his brothers to pass. Now they resided at Santa Felicita, near the side of San Giorgio, and when they reached home they took Grasso into a room on the ground-floor and bade him to stay there quietly till supper time ; the table was already covered, and there was a good fire. One of them next went to seek for a priest, residing at Santa Felicita, a good looking personage, to whom he said that he came to consult him, in confidence, as one neighbour ought to do with another : "You know there are three brothers of us, one of whom is Matteo, who was yesterday arrested for

debt. Such is the impression it appears to have made upon him, that he is gone almost beside himself ; and more particularly upon one point ; for he thinks he has become another person, a carver in ebony, of the name of Grasso, who has a shop at Santa Reparata ; and there seems to be no way of getting it out of his head. We have taken him out of prison and brought him home, confining him to his chamber, lest he should proclaim his folly to the world ; for should it once become public he will always have the reputation of it, though he were to become the wisest man in the world. This you very well know, and, for the same reason, I am come to entreat that you will consent to accompany me back, and try whether there is any chance of restoring him. Do this, and we shall always consider ourselves greatly indebted to you."

The good priest replied that he would cheerfully attend him ; for he was sure that if he could only engage his brother in conversation he should hit upon some method of restoring him to reason. So they set out together, and on their arrival the priest was instantly introduced to our hero, who rose up on his entrance. "Good evening to you, Matteo," said the former. "Good evening, and good year to you also," said Grasso, "who are you looking for?" The priest answered, "I am come to sit with you a little while ;" and seating himself, he continued : "Come, sit down by me, Matteo, and I will tell you what I am thinking of. You must know, I have been much concerned to hear that you have been arrested, and have taken the thing so much to heart as almost to lose your wits. Among other notions, they tell me that you have got it into your head you are no longer the same Matteo, but are become a certain fellow named Grasso the Carver, who keeps a shop at Santa Reparata. Now if this be so, you are much to blame for permitting such a slight reverse of fortune to affect your mind. I have to entreat you will dismiss these whims altogether from your imagination, and attend to your business like other people. By so doing you will please your brothers as well as me, besides doing yourself the greatest

service in the world ; for if you once let people suspect it, they will never give you credit for being in your senses again. Then rouse yourself, be a man, and scorn to indulge such absurdities any longer." Grasso, hearing the kind and encouraging way in which he spoke, declared that he should be glad to obey him as far as lay in his power, being convinced that it was all meant for his good ; and that from that hour he would no longer imagine he was any one else but Matteo, as it was clear he was not. There was one thing, however, that he particularly desired, which was to have an interview with the real Grasso, in order to set his mind quite at rest. "What then," said the priest, "I see it is still running in your head ; why do you wish to speak with Grasso ? It would only be indulging and proclaiming your folly," and he said so much that the poor man was content to abandon the idea. Then, leaving him alone, the priest went to inform the brothers of all that had passed, and shortly taking his leave, he returned to officiate at church.

While the priest had been engaged with our hero, came Philip Brunellesco, bringing with him a certain beverage, which he handed to one of the two brothers, saying, "Take care that you give him this to drink while you are at supper, for it will throw him into so sound a slumber that you might beat him to a mummy, during six hours, before he would awake. So give it him, and I will return again about five, when we will finish the joke." Accordingly the brothers sat down to sup with our hero, and contrived to make him swallow the whole of the mixture without his perceiving it. After supper, Grasso turned towards the fire, and the potion very soon began to operate in such a way that he was no longer able to keep his eyes open ; when the brothers, not a little amused, said to him, "Why, Matteo, you are very dull ; you are almost asleep !" "True," returned Grasso, "I think I never felt so sleepy in all my life ; had I never had a wink of sleep for this month past, I could not feel worse. So pray let me go to bed." And it was with some difficulty he was able to get there, and more especially to undress himself,

before he fell into a profound slumber, snoring like a pig. Philip, with three of his companions, then made his appearance, and finding him fast asleep, had him laid upon a litter, with all his clothes, and carried to his own house. No one being within, his mother not having yet returned from the country, they laid him gently upon his bed, and placed every thing exactly in the same order as usual. Next they took the keys of his shop, which they found hanging on a nail in the wall, and going straight to the place, they took all the instruments of his trade they could find and laid them in different positions. Planes, saws, hammers, rules and hatchets, all were turned awry, and confused in such sort, as if twenty demons had been puzzling their heads how to produce so much disorder. Then shutting up the shop again, they restored the keys to the same place, and retired to their own houses to rest. Grasso continued sunk in profound repose the whole night, nor awoke until after matins the next morning. Directly recognizing his old spot at Santa Reparata, he gazed through the window, and endeavoured to collect his confused thoughts. He felt the utmost astonishment at finding himself in his own house, considering where he lay down the preceding evening. "The Lord help me!" he exclaimed as he dressed himself, and took down the keys, proceeding with all haste to inspect his shop. "The Lord help me, what a sight is here!" he continued, as he beheld everything out of its place, and began the Herculean task of re-adjusting his different articles in the manner he had left them. At this moment arrived Matteo's brothers, who finding him thus busily engaged, affected not to know him, one of them saying, "Good day, master." Grasso turning round and recognizing them, began to change colour, replying, "Good day and good year; pray whom are you seeking?" "I will tell you," said the other. "We happen to have a brother whose name is Matteo, who has latterly become a little odd, and got into his head that he is no longer the same Matteo, but the master of this shop, a man of the name of Grasso. After giving him the best advice we could, the priest

of our parish, a very good kind of person, tried to assist us in eradicating this foolish impression from his mind, and we believed that he was getting better, as he fell into a quiet slumber before we left him. But this morning we found that he had absconded : whither he is fled we know not, and we came here to inquire." Grasso seemed quite confounded at this account, and turning towards them, said, "I know nothing of all this; why disturb me with your affairs? Matteo has never been here ; if he said he was I, he was guilty of a falsehood, and if I meet with him I intend to tell him so, and learn whether I am he, or he is I, before we part. We are surely all bedevilled within this day or two !" and with this he seized his cloak, and left them in great anger, closing his shop, and proceeding towards Santa Reparata, complaining bitterly the whole way. The brothers also went off, while our hero, stopping at the church, began to walk about in great wrath, until he happened to be joined by one of his companions, formerly his fellow labourer in the same trade of inlaid work, under Maestro Pellegrino, a native of Terma. This youth had for some time been settled in Hungary, and managed his affairs so well that he had returned to Florence, in order to obtain assistance to execute the numerous commissions he received. Often had he tried to persuade Grasso to accompany him back, by holding out the prospect of his acquiring great wealth ; and the moment our hero cast his eyes upon him, he resolved to avail himself of the offer. Hastening towards him, he said, "You have more than once asked me to go with you into Hungary, which I have hitherto refused ; but now, from some particular circumstances, as well as a little dispute with my mother, I shall be very happy to return with you. Yet if I am to go, it must be soon, as most probably before to-morrow it might be too late." The young man received this proposal with great joy, and it was arranged that Grasso should immediately proceed to Bologna, where he was to wait for his companion. He accordingly hired a horse, and set out for that city, having first left a letter for his mother informing her of his departure, and

desiring her to take possession of his property in Florence. The undertakings of the two friends in Hungary prospered so well that they acquired considerable fortunes, and Grasso more than once returned to his native place, and told his friends the mysterious adventure of his earlier years.

MASUCCIO SALERNITANO
(1420-1500)



THE REVENGE OF A STERN HUSBAND

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

ATTRACTED by the very distinguished and ancient reputation enjoyed by the university of Bologna, an eminent scholar of Castile resolved to visit that city for the purpose of obtaining the legal degrees. The young man's name was Messer Alfonso da Toledo, esteemed for his virtues, and in very easy circumstances ; the recent death of his father, a noble cavalier, having left it in his power to furnish himself with every thing requisite for his studies. Thus, with handsome equipments, steeds, domestics, an excellent library, and a thousand gold florins in his purse, he set out upon his way to Italy. Passing in a few days, by way of Castile and Catalonia, into France, he arrived at Avignon, where he proposed for a short time to remain.

The next day, as he was proceeding from his inn, to amuse himself with observing the place, he chanced to behold, looking from a balcony, a very beautiful lady, whose equal he imagined he had never before seen ; and as he passed along, her attractions were still present to his view. Such, indeed, was the impression that, abandoning all his laudable pursuits, he determined to remain in that place until he obtained some portion of her regard. By frequently passing her house, and throwing himself on all occasions in her way, he so far be-

trayed his attachment that, being a very artful creature, she quickly perceived that she had him in her power. Aware of his youth and inexperience, as well as of his wealth and quality, she began to consider how she might best impose upon him, for her own interested purposes. And in order to engage more speedily in a conference, like some piratical vessel sending out its boats to seize provisions for its voyage, she fixed upon a wicked old creature, well trained to the business, and seating herself in the window, prepared to observe the result. This it was that the poor youth most ardently desired. Before the old hag broke off the interview, she had learned everything from him she wished ; and after various presents and messages had passed on both sides, it was agreed that he should be permitted to wait upon the lady the following evening, on the condition of bringing with him a thousand gold florins as the price of the lady's conquest. When the hour arrived, this imprudent and unfortunate young man was conducted to her dwelling, and received with apparent pleasure by its inmate, whose name was Laura, and there, unhappily for them both, he remained with her until the following day. And having arranged how they should in future meet without fear of exciting the suspicions of her relations, the wretched youth reluctantly took his leave, and returned to his own abode.

The lady seized upon her spoils with triumph, and before her lover left her, so imposed upon his credulity by her arts, that having dismissed all idea of Bologna and its studies from his mind, he expected to have frequent access to her society. So the following evening, not in the least doubting of the same favourable reception, he hastened at the same hour to the lady's residence, and having repeated the signal of his arrival without effect, he was at length compelled, however unwillingly, to retire with the loss, no less of his wealth and honour, than of his beloved object, and, stung with rage and grief, slumber refused to visit his eyes during the whole of that unhappy night. Resolved the next morning to ascertain this cruel treachery, he again visited the fatal house, where he

found both doors and windows closed, in confirmation of all his worst fears that he had been vilely abandoned and betrayed by the artful woman to whom he was so passionately attached. He returned to his friends and followers full of desperate thoughts against himself, which stifling with the utmost difficulty, he prepared to leave the place. And being quite destitute of means to discharge his expenses, he was compelled to dispose of one of his finest mules. Having thus satisfied his host with the trifling resources which yet remained, he proceeded on his way through Provence towards Italy, plunged in the deepest grief at the thoughts of having to travel to Bologna, and to reside there as a poor student, instead of making the noble figure he had expected. As he went thus full of grievous thoughts along his weary way, being arrived at Trayques, he had the singular fortune to take up his residence at the same inn where the husband of the artful Laura had just entered for the night. He was a handsome and accomplished cavalier, of distinguished eloquence, and great authority in the state, and was then returning from an embassy sent by the King of France to the Pope. Having begged the host to inform him should any noble traveller alight, in order to enjoy his society at table, a custom always observed by travellers from France, he was told that there was a Spanish scholar going to Bologna, who, according to the account of his domestics, appeared buried in the profoundest sorrow, having scarcely broken fast for the last two days. On hearing this, the cavalier very good-naturedly determined to invite the poor youth to sup with him, and, becoming his own messenger, he introduced himself into his room, where he found him seated in a disconsolate attitude ; and taking him affectionately by the hand, entreated he would favour him with his company to supper. The youth perceiving from his appearance that he was a person of some importance, could not refuse, thus invited, to accompany him ; and sitting down together, when they had concluded their meal, they dismissed their domestics from the room. The ambassador then ventured to inquire into the

object of the young man's travels, and next, as far as delicacy allowed, into the cause of his apparent affliction. Messer Alfonso, in great emotion, replied with difficulty to his first question, entreating to be excused from touching upon the latter. But his new friend, having learned the reason of his leaving home, and the high respectability of his family, became still more solicitous to discover the origin of the excessive melancholy which seemed to overpower him. After frequently evading his questions, the youth was at length persuaded by the deep interest he evinced in his welfare, to confide to him the whole of his unhappy adventure, with the lady's name, and the manner in which he had been entertained by her ; adding, that the disappointment he felt at being thus betrayed, and the loss of all his resources, had driven him to the verge of despair. The cavalier, who had thus unconsciously insisted upon the knowledge of his own dishonour, at these words, soon presented a far more distressing picture of wretchedness than even the author of his disgrace ; and it is for high-minded men alone, who may have survived the loss of honour, to appreciate the real nature of his feelings. But with his usual prudence and self-command, he checked the impulse of his feelings, adopting with singular promptness the line of conduct which he conceived such emergency required. Then turning towards the youth, he thus addressed him : "You have, indeed, young man, given a loose to your passions in a very reprehensible manner, and fallen into the snares of a vile wretch, whom, from your own statements, you should have avoided with the utmost care. Could my severest reproaches now avail you, I should never cease to condemn your folly : but as you are in far greater want of assistance than of blame, it will be enough to leave you to the remorse such conduct cannot fail to produce. Cease however to entertain the desperate thoughts you have already too much indulged ; and you shall find that in the end I will become your real friend, and treat you no otherwise than if you were my own son. And as you may perceive I am a foreigner, bound to pursue my route,

excuse me if I cannot be at your disposal, and do not object to accompany me back the way you came. Come to my house for a few days, and I then promise you that you shall pursue your first intentions with far more pleasure than you at present believe. For the reputation of your family and your father's noble character will not permit me to behold his son proceeding thus unhappily to commence his studies, unable to support the respectability of his name, and the virtues to which it has ever been allied." Surprised at these proofs of kindness, the youth expressed his gratitude, as far as mingled grief and shame permitted him to give utterance to his feelings. They then separated for the night, and the next day set out on their way towards France, travelling so speedily under the direction of the cavalier that they arrived, ere night-fall, in the city of Avignon. The cavalier then taking the young man's arm, immediately conducted him to his own house, the fatal house whither he had before resorted ; and recognizing the spot, he beheld the same lady advancing with lights in her hands to welcome her husband home. Aware of the whole truth, he immediately gave himself up for lost ; and being scarcely able to alight from his horse, the cavalier assisted him, and led him trembling into the same apartment, the scene of his guilty pleasures, and now, of his bitter and inexpressible remorse. The wife, starting back at the sight of the student, stood, as if conscious of her impending fate ; and it would be impossible to describe the grief and terror at that moment depicted on her countenance. The supper made its appearance, when they sat down, together with the lady, all in their secret thoughts indulging varied feelings of pain. The supper table being withdrawn, the cavalier turning towards his wife, thus addressed her : "Laura, bring me the thousand gold florins which this young person gave you, and for which you bartered, together with your person, your own honour, and mine, and that of all our family."

On hearing these words, the lady appeared as if she were sinking into the earth, and was unable to utter the least

answer. Her husband then fixing his eye upon her with a stern expression, and seizing his dagger, exclaimed : "Thou vilest of women, as you value your life, this moment do as I have commanded you." Marking his rising passion, his wife, overpowered with fear, and weeping bitterly, dared not even deny the fact ; and going out immediately, returned with the money, which she laid with a trembling hand upon the table. Having examined it, her husband took one of the pieces, and presented it to the young man, who stood speechless with fear, momentarily expecting, together with the lady, to feel the fatal dagger at his heart. As he presented the coin, the cavalier thus continued : "Every one ought to be rewarded for his pains ; and as this lady was at the trouble of entertaining you both with love and scorn, and may deservedly be ranked with the vilest of her sex, who do not deserve to receive more than one ducat at once ; I beg that you sir, who hired her, will please to pay her what I have given you." And compelling his wife to receive it, it was so done. Then perceiving the young man to be quite oppressed with fear and shame, his eyes fixed upon the earth, and his voice convulsed with sobs, he continued : "Take your ill-guarded and ill-spent gold, poor youth, and remember for the future to employ it better than in purchasing your shame, instead of acquiring the reputation and honour which your family has a right to expect. Aim at nobler pursuits, signor ! But I would not willingly distress you ; you require rest, and you may sleep under my roof secure. I give you my hand, as a man of honour : leave us ; good night !"

The unhappy youth was then shown into a richly furnished apartment, with every attendance and convenience ; but his thoughts were of too wild a nature to admit of repose. Often did they wander back to the last looks of the associate of his guilty pleasures ; often did he start up in terror as if he had heard her voice : he was indeed safe ; but the light of morning never again broke upon that lady's eyes.

The following day, the cavalier, having prepared for their departure, accompanied the youth about ten miles beyond

the city, and on taking leave, presented him with various rich presents, saying : "Although I have granted you your life, no less than the fortune you had lost, I cannot feel easy in parting with you unless you consent to receive from my hands these trifling gifts, together with this horse, as a recompense for the sale of your mule. In token of my pity for you, and in consideration of the sufferings you have incurred, deign to accept them, and henceforward consider me in the light of a father ; as I shall continue to feel the same interest in you, as if you were really my son." And then tenderly embracing the poor youth, whose continued sobs and tears choked his utterance, he took a sorrowful leave of him, imposing only perpetual silence as to the events which had just taken place. Unable to thank him, the youth pursued his way to Bologna, while the cavalier returned to the city of Avignon. But never having been made acquainted with the after fortunes of either party, I refrain from adding anything further on the subject.



MATTEO BANDELLO
(End of 15th Century - 1561)



(I)

A BOLD LOVER

(Translated by PERCY PINKERTON)

A M O N G those Lombard fugitives who came on to Mantua after the famous defeat of the Swiss at Melegnano¹ was Messer Cornelio. With myself he took up his abode in that city. It is a pleasure to me, having all good cause for it, to speak of him as a most noble and gallant young gentleman of about four-and-twenty, tall, well-made, and of great strength and comeliness. He had his full share of virtues ; while, in the gifts of fortune, he was passing rich. His mother, who lived in Milan, and took the utmost pains to save his patrimony intact, always sent him all that he needed, so that he could keep a house in Mantua, and was well furnished with clothes, and horses, and serving folk. Before leaving Milan he fell in love, as lads will do, with a young married lady of high birth and great beauty, whom, that no scandal touch her, we will call Camilla. As a zealous partisan of the Sforzas, when Maximilian Cæsar came, Cornelio had done all he

¹The battle of Marignano, fought on September 13, 1515, when Francis I. completely routed the Switzers, and in fact decided the fate of the Duchy of Milan, which Maximilian Sforza had so miserably governed.

possibly could to recapture his fatherland, and he was still in close relationship with Duke Francesco Sforza, often going to Trent, and scheming ceaselessly to bring about the Duke's return to Milan. But with all these plottings and schemings he could never forget his mistress. Indeed, she was in his thoughts by day as by night, and it grieved him far more not to be with her nor see her face than to be banished from Milan.

This Camilla whom Cornelio thus passionately loved was but a girl, not yet one-and-twenty ; and of all the beauties in Milan she was held to be the fairest. And though this mutual liking had led to no grave consequences, Cornelio's long devotion, and the absolute truth and sincerity of his love, caused her to repay this heartily ; so she herself was grieved beyond measure at his going, and often bemoaned his absence. They had not yet had the chance to speak freely of their loves, but by means of the man who drove her carriage they had often written to each other. The driver was very willing to do their bidding in this, as he had long been in the service of Cornelio's mother. Indeed, had chance favoured them, the lovers would very readily have compassed their desires.

While Cornelio thus lived in Mantua, not as an outlaw, but in great affluence and honour, it happened that a gentlewoman of the city fell desperately in love with him, apprising him indirectly of her deep affection. To the waiting-woman who brought these love-messages he replied with a sigh, "My good woman, you can tell your mistress that I am under great obligations to her for her courteous tenders of affection, knowing that I am loved by her beyond any merit that is mine. It pains me much that I cannot return her the same, but I am not free to dispose of myself at will, having plighted my troth to another, and, being so bound, cannot loose myself. Of a truth, if I were my own, not another's, I would be hers without fail. Her beauty and engaging manners seem to me worthy of all honour and service, not only at my hands, but at the hands of those far greater than myself. Neverthe-

less, if she would command my life or my worldly goods, they are at her disposal ; these I offer willingly, provided that I fail not in my constancy to her for whom I live and die."

The messenger brought back this answer verbatim to her mistress ; and, dear ladies, you may easily imagine how bitter was her chagrin at being thus refused, if you will only put yourselves in her place. She was a damsel of about six- or seven-and-twenty years, to whom the greatest gentlemen in Manuta had paid court, yet, as I afterwards knew for certain, had never loved any one before our friend Cornelio inspired her with such fervent affection.

Touching this, let me tell you what I said to him upon my return from Trent. When he had recounted the whole story, I said, "My good Cornelio, forgive my excessive frankness, but our brotherly friendship emboldens me to say as much and more if occasion serves. You say that in Milan you have fallen deeply in love, which I believe, for I know how soft of heart are the ladies of Milan, and how prone they are to love. But think you that your mistress differs in aught from other women, or that if, in your absence, she came across any man that pleased her she would hesitate to get such solace as fortune had chanced to offer her ? Be sure that there is not a woman on earth who, having an opportunity to amuse herself with a man she likes, omits to profit by it, if only the thing may be done in secret. As you know, I have many relatives in Milan, the Bossa family being both numerous and ancient. Now, I believe my sisters and the rest of my kinsfolk to be made of flesh and blood, like any other women with whom I have had dealings. Compared with you, I am an old man, so that I have tried a good many. Women, my friend, are women all the world over, generally doing that which belongs to their sex. There you go, all day long, fretting your jesses like a hawk, taking naught in the way of pleasure, and believing that she you love does likewise. But, as I think, you are grossly mistaken. Assuming that she loves you, keeps true to you, and does as you do (though I can never believe that

she is so silly as to remain with her hands at her waistband), what harm or reproach or slight do you do her if, being now here, you take your pleasure with some other woman? How shall this bring her any hurt? Do here what you like, and as all of us do who, not to seem wall-eyed, lick both sides of the platter, taking what is good when we may, since things left are lost. This gentlewoman here loves you, and tells you so, therefore you ought to love and woo her in your turn. What the devil would you have more? Remember that Dame Fortune wears her hair in front; the back of her head is bald. If she should see that you neglect the chances that she offers you, and she be angered against you, you may say, as they said when Giovanni Galeazzo was encamped about the walls of Florence, and caused races for the mantle to be run on St. John's Day, viz., 'The game is up, unless death be our help.'¹ Therefore, that you be not brought to a like pass, give yourself a good time while you may. Make up to this pretty gentlewoman; and when we are back in Milan, you can amuse yourself with the other."

With these and a thousand similar arguments I sought to persuade him, but all my words fell upon deaf ears. He was firmly resolved not to break faith with his lady, and he begged me to say no more to him about this matter. When she got Cornelio's answer, the fair Mantuan was greatly mortified and confounded. However, making a virtue of necessity, she grew calm, and the ardour of her love changed to an intimate sisterly friendship. Even to this day she loves Cornelio as a brother. The first time she spoke to him after getting her answer she highly praised his loyal resolve, and even now, whenever love is the subject under discussion, she always declares Cornelio to be the truest and the most faithful of all lovers.

Laying aside, then, all other loves, Cornelio thought of no

¹Death, in fact, did come to the aid of the beleaguered Florentines, as their enemy, Gian Galeazzo, fell a victim to the plague on September 3, 1393. It is characteristic of the man that he should have taken the appearance in the heavens of a comet as a presage of his death.

one save of his dear lady in Milan, his only consolation being to get letters now and again from her, or to write to her in reply. This seemed to cool the heat of his passion, a faint help, a slight comfort, perhaps, yet one which in a measure served to while away his time of exile.

One day a letter was delivered to him from his lady-love which gave him much matter for thought, and he felt at a loss how to act. Camilla's husband, as it happened, was obliged to leave Milan for an estate of his in the country, where he would have to remain for some time. Knowing this, she wrote to Cornelio, as usual, an affectionate letter, in which, among other things, were these words :—

"See, now, my dear lord, if you and I have not fortune adverse to our wishes, and if we have not good reason to bewail our bad luck, for my husband is about to leave Milan for one of our places in the country, and will be absent for some days. Were you but here while he is away, we might easily be together ; but I see no chance of this, and am infinitely grieved that we cannot meet." A thousand other loving messages followed, of the sort that damsels who love ardently are wont to write.

The letter greatly perplexed Cornelio, and at length he went to see his friend Delio, whom he loved as himself, and who when in Milan had known all about this love-matter, as indeed about all Cornelio's other affairs. Putting the paper into Delio's hand he said, "Read." Hardly had Delio read the letter than he seemed to guess what Cornelio thought of doing, and said, "My friend, you want to go to Milan and get your head cut off, an absolutely unreasonable proceeding. I can easily see that this woman wants to cause your death, and make that death an ignominious one to boot, for you know what a grudge the French have against you."

"You are always harping on such horrors," replied Cornelio; "do but listen to me a little, for I should like us calmly to consider this question of my going, and judge which course to take that shall prove the lesser ill. You know how much I love that woman, and what sufferings I have borne in paying

court to her, and in doing her loyal service. Yet, in spite of all my efforts to be alone with her, we have never yet had an opportunity for this. Now that her husband is not there, I could easily manage to meet her, and get that which I have so long desired ; and, if this came to pass, I should prize the boon far more than aught else which fortune might bring me. What say you, now ?”

“My dear Cornelio,” replied his friend, “you would have us talk over the matter calmly, dispassionately ; but I see no way of doing this, for you yourself are so passionately bent upon this woman, and have become so blind as not to see the death that stares you in the face. Therefore you must be ruled by one whose eyes are open. You know that I love you, for you have oftentimes put that love to the test, therefore take heed to what I say ; drive these silly fancies out of your head, for all this that you think is mere vague imagination. I advise you as I would have you advise me were I in a like case, viz., on no account go to Milan. Do you forget that you have been proclaimed a rebel, and that all your goods are confiscated ? You would hardly be gone from here than they would know of it in Milan. Just now, in Carnival-time, this place is full of masks, and there are many who spy out all that you say and do. Moreover, you have already been warned from Milan that you can do nothing that they do not know there. If, which God forbid ! you go thither, and by mischance fall into the hands of the French, not all the gold in the world will save your head. Would you, just for a brief and fleeting pleasure, lose your life ? Then, again, how can you be certain of getting there in safety ? You would have to pass through Cremona and Soncino, or else by way of Pizzighitone and Lodi. In all these places you are better known than the way-side nettle. Yet, assuming that you travel by disused roads to avoid being seen, what assurance have you, on reaching Milan, that you will obtain of her that which you so hotly desire ?

“I believe that, knowing that you could not, and indeed dared not, go to Milan, she wrote thus to show you that she

ever bears you in her thoughts and loves you most dearly ; for, had she believed that you could with safety come, she would have written differently. Now, supposing that when you arrive she is perfectly ready to do your pleasure, ought you not to reflect what sort of house hers is, and that, though her husband be absent, his household servants are all at home ? Don't you know what a grim old body is her female companion, who never leaves her side for an instant, and perhaps even sleeps with her when the husband is away ? For just one hour of bitter-sweet toying, would you endanger your life ? And if mischance should overtake you in this attempt, what would be said of you, then ? Though young, you are deemed wise, with prudence and wit riper than your years might warrant ; do not, then, shake the general belief in your discretion. If for the service and benefit of your lord you must needs go to Milan, and if evil betided you, at the least you would win general compassion even from your foes, being praised as the loyal, faithful servant of your master. But, for such a thing as this, besides the hurt, you would only get perpetual reproach and ignominy. My brother, do you keep this life of yours which you value so lightly ; keep it for a better use, for a more honourable enterprise than this."

This advice served to cool Cornelio's ardour not a little, albeit it was much against his will. Being at a loss what to answer, he remarked that night was the mother of thoughts, and that he would reflect further upon the matter before he saw Delio again. So saying, he took his leave. When night came, and he found himself alone, as sleep he could not, he gave rein to his thoughts, turning over all in his mind, and remembering the argument he had had with Delio. There being no one at hand to contradict him, appetite overcame him ; and he determined, though death should be his portion, to go to Milan.

He rose with the dawn and went to see Delio, who was still abed, saying to him, " Delio mine, I have determined, no matter what befall me, to start on such and such a day at nightfall, and go straight away to Cremona, and wait there

until the city-gate is opened, when I shall visit the house of our friend Messer Girolamo, and stay with him all day. Late in the evening I must push on to Lodi at Zurlesco, where I shall be privily lodged at Signor Oistarino's. Here also I mean to remain a whole day until evening, when I shall journey to Milan, arriving there in the third hour of the night. As you know, the Porta Ticinese is open at all hours to any one who can pay the porter a few pence ; and, on entering the city, I shall go straight to Messer Ambrogio's."

When Delio knew of his friend's intention, he used all possible efforts to turn him from his purpose. But though he said all that he knew and all that he could, Cornelio was resolutely determined to go at all cost, adding as a final reason, "I would fain try my fortune, and, if the thing succeeds, as I desire and hope it may, what more fortunate and happy lover than I ? And if it should happen otherwise, this solace at least I shall have, that she whom I love will plainly perceive that my devotion to her was true, and not feigned."

When Delio saw that Cornelio was determined to run such a risk, and that no remedy might avail to hinder him, he said that, as Cornelio was bent upon going, he had better leave his own servants behind in Mantua, and take with him others of trustworthy character, who were not known in Milan. He accordingly engaged three servants, and got everything in readiness. On the evening appointed he stealthily quitted Mantua, and, taking the route he had already planned, he reached Milan in the third hour of the night, and went straight to the house of Messer Ambrogio, his very faithful friend. He bade one of his serving-men knock at the door and tell Messer Ambrogio to come down at once, as there was a gentleman who wished to speak with him. Then Cornelio whistled in such a way that Ambrogio knew it was he ; so, coming down, he unbarred the door and said, "Who's there ?" Without answering, Cornelio made a certain sign, when Messer Ambrogio, doubly assured of the truth, caused the torches to be taken inside which he had had brought out with him to light the threshold, and then joyfully welcomed his friend. He took

him into a chamber on the ground floor, letting nobody know who the new-comer was, except one trusted servant. It was in the month of February and for many days there had been no rain nor snow to spoil the roads, so that they were very dusty ; however, Cornelio had had an easy ride of it.

When morning came Cornelio sent for a tailor, who used to carry letters to him from Camilla. The man was overjoyed at seeing him, and they talked together for a good while. Cornelio then gave the tailor a letter, which he was to take to his lady. When aware of her lover's arrival in Milan, she felt at once glad and sorrowful—glad in the hope of seeing her Cornelio, who loved her and her alone, she was very certain, since he had exposed himself to such peril for her sake ; and sorrowful, because in a day or so her husband would return. You must know that in the letter she wrote to Cornelio she mistook the day of her husband's going, so that Cornelio delayed his departure from Mantua overlong. Camilla sent back a billet by the tailor, to tell Cornelio that she would expect to meet him that very day at such and such an hour at the gateway of her palace. He was to come masked, and make a certain sign. At the time fixed, Cornelio (wearing a mask) donned one of those long coloured dresses then in fashion with Milanese gentlemen, put plumes in his cap, and, mounting a beautiful little jennet, rode off alone to Camilla's house. There she stood in the doorway, talking to some gentlemen, looking lovelier and more graceful than ever. Cornelio halted, and bowing to the lady gave the sign, but did not utter a word. Seeing a mask stop silently near them, and thinking it might be some one who wished to speak to Camilla unobserved, the gentlemen discreetly set spurs to their mules and rode off, leaving Cornelio (though they did not recognise him) a fair field. When they had gone he reverently saluted the lady, who, amid countless blushes, was for a long while unable to say a word. Half beside himself for joy, Cornelio could hardly realise his position as he gazed upon the supreme beauty of his lady-love. At length, breaking this delicious silence, they found voice, and spoke much of their great love,

fortune favouring them in this talk ; for though many masks and cavaliers passed along the street, no one, noticing the lady in close converse with a mask, accosted them, so that they talked on, unhindered, until the brown dusk fell.

The lady chid her lover not a little for having exposed himself to so perilous a risk, blaming him moreover for not coming in time, as she hourly expected her husband. So Cornelio produced her own letter, and, reading it, showed her that she had mistaken the date of her husband's departure by a week, which error much confused her. Nevertheless she agreed to see Cornelio that night at the fourth hour, when her serving-maid, being in the secret, should at a given signal let him into the house. If, however, that evening the husband should have come back, on giving the signal Cornelio would hear the waiting-woman say at one of the windows of the great hall, "I am sure that I left the comb here, but now I cannot find it."

Upon getting this promise, Cornelio in great glee returned to the inn, where he partook of a light meal ; and when the Broletto clock struck four he put on a coat of mail, with gauntlets and sleeves to match, and, taking a sword, set out for his lady's house. While waiting there for the door to be opened he heard, close by, a great buffeting of armed men, and the noise of many blows. Then one, running past, called out, "Alack ! I am dead !" and fell down in front of Camilla's door just as the maid opened it for Cornelio to enter. The night was very dark, so that, without a light, nothing whatever could be seen ; but the noise of this scuffle had brought some of the neighbours to their windows with lights, and one of them, living opposite, spied Cornelio going into the lady's house, sword in hand. Though he heard somebody fall close at his feet, Cornelio took no heed, not even thinking about this, for his whole mind was set on something else. The maid took him into a room between the postern and the main entrance, where he was to wait till Camilla came. She, hearing that her lover was downstairs, feigned sudden indisposition, and told all her servants to go to bed. Hereupon the men-servants all

went out of the house to sleep, as it was Carnival-time, and their master was away, leaving only the old cellarer and two pages, lads of about fourteen years, at home. The women of the house went to their beds ; and, when she knew that they were all sleeping, Camilla crept downstairs with the maid, as quietly as she could, to fetch Cornelio up to her chamber.

While all this was going on, the watch happened to pass along the street. The head of the police at that time was a certain Monsignor Sandio, a very tall, big man, such as one seldom sees, who as his lieutenant had one Mombojero.

Having heard of the fray (which was now over), and finding a groom in the service of Signor Galeazzo Sanseverino (Master of the Horse to his most Christian Majesty the King) half dead, and his body still warm, the captain of the watch called up the neighbours, and sought to know from them how the fight began. But these could tell nothing, save that they had heard a great outcry and clash of arms. Then one of them suddenly said that he had seen a tall fellow, sword in hand, go into Madonna Camilla's house, at whose threshold the dead groom lay. So the officer went thither, and, knocking loudly, called out in French, "What ho, there ! Let me in !" At this the lovers were greatly terrified, as they believed that some spy had found out that Cornelio was there. Camilla had only just joined her gallant in the room below, and was about to give him an affectionate embrace, he doing likewise, when, lo and behold ! the watch knocked at the door.

Startled by the noise, Cornelio, quick as thought, clapped two stools one upon another, and, helped by Camilla and her maid, climbed up into the chimney, where, planting his feet firmly on the two great hooks from which pots hang, he kept in an upright position, having his sword in his hand. Then, taking away the stools, and closing the room, Camilla said, "Who is there ? Who knocks ?" The keys were fetched, and when the cellarer and other women-folk, roused by the noise, came up, they opened the door, and Camilla in her boldest voice cried, "What do you want at this hour ?" The captain,

who had heard that the palace belonged to a person of quality, answered, "Pardon us, madam, if we disturb you at this hour, for we do it unwillingly. I was told that he who killed the groom, who lies outside your door, entered in here ; and, if this be so, I have come with the watch to arrest him."

Camilla, who had feared it was her lover they wanted, was half-reassured at hearing this ; and she replied, "Sir, I have had my door locked ever since nightfall, as my husband is away from house, so I know that nobody has entered the house, as I have kept the keys. But, in order to satisfy you, all the rooms shall be opened, so you may search."

So they first of all entered the room where poor Cornelio was hiding in the chimney, who through the hole at the top watched the stars and shivered.

Searching here, there, and everywhere, under the bolsters and under the bed, one of the sergeants, to show what special zeal was his, struck the rope holding up the canopy over the bed with his halberd, so that the whole thing came tumbling down. Cornelio kept perfectly quiet, repeating to himself the monkeys' paternosters.¹ Leaving this room the fellows searched in every hole and corner of the house ; and when they could only find the two pages and the cellar-man, they went down into the basement. Thinking the assassin might be hidden inside the casks, they were desirous to taste the flavour of most of the wines. As often happens on such occasions, some of the neighbours came in to see what was going on ; among these was the fellow who had told the captain of the watch that he saw the murderer enter the house. Not finding the culprit, the captain decided to take his accuser before the court, believing that he knew more about the matter.

Hardly had the officer and his men got half-way down the street than Camilla's husband came up. Finding the door open, and the neighbours with his wife making a great fluster and buzzing, he was greatly astonished. When Camilla saw him she felt more dead than alive, and cried out, "Alas ! my

¹Which means that his teeth chattered with cold and fright.

lord, just look here at what these sergeants of the watch have been doing to this room and to the whole house !” Taking him by the hand, she led him into the chamber where Cornelio was ; and in order to let the latter know that her husband had come back, she called out loudly, “Look, husband dear ; look how the rogues have turned everything upside down !” Then she told him why the watch had come ; but her husband, being very tired, felt more inclined for rest than anything else, so he said, “Wife, let us go to bed now, and we will see to these matters in the morning.”

Apprised by his voice of the husband’s return, Cornelio for very fright was like to have swooned. Then the neighbours were sent away, the door was locked, and the horses were taken off to the stables hard by. The husband went up to his room, where he had a fire lighted, and got the servants to undress him preparatory to going to bed, while two of his men lay down in the room where Cornelio was hiding up the chimney, in sore discomfort, and knowing not what to do. Some of the other serving-men had put their arquebuses and partisans here before going to sleep in their usual quarters. Leaving her husband abed, Camilla came down again with her maid to discover if there were any way of setting Cornelio free. When she saw the two servants in bed there, she said, “You ought not to have put yourself here, as everything is in such a mess.” Then the major-domo came in and said, “Let them shift, lady, just for to-night as best they may, and in the morning all shall be put straight. Do you go up to bed, for by now it must be midnight.”

Camilla saw that she could give her lover no sort of help, so she said, “I also came down to see that no fire was lighted here, as the chimney top is cracked, and might easily set the house on fire.” With this she went upstairs, still thinking of poor Cornelio. Finding her husband nearly asleep, she lay down beside him, and said, “You have come home rather late, my lord, for this cold weather.” “Yes,” he answered, “I left Novara this morning, expecting to get here by nightfall, but our kinsfolk, the Cribelli, kept me such a time at Buffaloro

that I changed my mind, and decided to have supper and sleep at our place on the Navilio. I got there late, and the steward had prepared an excellent supper for us, but asked me to excuse the bad sleeping accommodation, as the beds, which in war-time had been fetched away to Milan, had not yet come back, though I thought they had. So I determined to come on here as soon as we had supped ; and, as the roads were good, and the way safe, we did this."

Cornelio, who had heard all that went on, was now in a greater fright than ever, fearing that, overcome by sleep, he might fall down and be killed by the servants. On the other hand, the icy blasts which blew down the chimney seemed to pierce his very bones. He more than once thought of letting himself drop as gently as possible when those in the room were fast asleep, and so escape ; but he was unfamiliar with the house, and knew neither how to get out nor where to hide. Then, again, his feet hurt him greatly, as the hooks were round, and to stand on them for long was most uncomfortable ; indeed, he could hardly keep himself in that position at all. Nevertheless, hoping to get away when morning came, he buoyed himself up with this faint hope, thinking of his lady's beauty, and saying to himself now and again, "The great discomfort that I now endure is not half as great as that which I ought to suffer for the enjoyment of such beauty and charm as belong to my lady. How should she know that I loved her wholly and solely, if for her sake I did not endure far greater perils and far sharper pains ?" So, with thoughts such as these, and helped by ardent love, he set himself courageously to bear all.

In the meanwhile, as we have seen, the captain of the watch took the accuser to the court and brought him before Mombojero, who, after questioning him, threatened him with all kinds of tortures if he did not tell the truth about the groom's murder. But the poor wretch could only repeat what at first he had said ; and Mombojero thereupon ordered the watch to go back to the house, and search it thoroughly from top to bottom. So the captain returned thither with his men, and

knocked so loud that all in the house heard him. The cellarer got up first, and, fetching the keys, went to open the door, while his master dressed himself. On entering, the officer went straight to the room where Cornelio was, who had heard all, and thought the sergeants were come on some other pretext to arrest him. Seeing the two lackeys asleep, and finding halberds and firearms in the room, the captain in a trice had both fellows bound. The steward had only just got out of prison, where he had been kept a long while for wounding a workman. When the man asked what all this might mean, the officer, recognising him, replied, "Marry, but you shall soon know, and pay both for this and the other affair as well." Then, just as the sergeants were going upstairs, down came the secretary, whom they promptly arrested. In great surprise at hearing this, the master of the house, half dressed, meets the captain on the stairs, who calls out, "Monsignor, you are a prisoner of the most Christian king !" To say this and to seize him was the work of an instant. They also clapped hands on three or four others, making the very deuce of a rumpus, so that it was as if the Day of Judgment had come. Cornelio, hearing all their din, said to himself, "God help us ! what devilry are they up to now ?"

The master of the house tried to make excuses for his servants and himself, saying that he had only returned from the country a little before midnight with his men. But it was in vain to protest, as the watch without further ado marched the whole nine of them off to the court-house, where they were put in the prisons.

At this fresh trouble Camilla wept bitterly. But as she knew that her husband and his folk were innocent of the murder in question, she thanked God for what had happened, as it gave her a chance to set her faithful lover free. So, after locking the door, and sending her women and the others back to their beds, she went with her maid into the room where poor Cornelio, like the Jews, awaited the coming of the Messiah. Approaching the chimney she dried her tears, and laughingly

called up to Cornelio, "Sweetheart, how are you? What are you doing? You may safely come down now, for God, to prevent a greater scandal, has suffered my lord husband with most of his serving-men to be carried off to the court-house." Then the maid placed the stools as before, and she and her mistress held them fast for Cornelio to step on. He soon came deftly down, and was gleefully welcomed by Camilla, who took him upstairs to her chamber, where a good fire was lighted. After washing his hands and face, which were all besmirched with soot, Cornelio soon shook off the chill that the chimney had given him, and laughed many a time with her at all these misadventures which had befallen him.

Early next morning Camilla had her lover taken to a little room, where everything he needed was fitly supplied to him by the maid; and here, when it was convenient, the lady visited him. Then, having summoned her relatives, she took steps for the release of her husband, informing them exactly how the whole thing had occurred. However, the matter went further than ever they thought, as it became necessary to send a notary to Novara to examine witnesses, and also make inquiries at the village where the hapless gentleman and his crew had supped, to prove the truth of their assertions. In this way six days elapsed before they could get out of prison, and all the while Cornelio passed every night in his lady's company, for fear that, sleeping alone, she might see some disagreeable ghost. Then, knowing the day of her husband's home-coming, she sent Cornelio away betimes, after countless kisses and endearments, when he straightway returned to the inn. Having dined, he went, masked, to pay his respects to Signor Alessandro Bentivoglio and his lady, Signora Ippolita Sforza. While conversing with them certain gentlemen came in, one of whom told how Mombojero had just been with the police officers to Cornelio's house, having got wind of his departure from Mantua, and of his arrival in Milan. At this news Cornelio soon bade his friends farewell, and, going back

to his lodging, determined to remain no longer in such peril. So, that very night, he took horse and rode back to Mantua, by way of Bergamo and Brescia, not caring to travel by the road that he had first taken, lest haply he might meet some ill-favoured folk by the way.

(II)

THE DEVIL IS AN ASS

(Translated by PERCY PINKERTON)

Y O U must know that in the venerable convent of St. Domenico at Modena (Fra Agostino Moro being Prior at that time, as doubtless you are aware) there happened to be an excellent preacher on the third day of Easter. All through Lent he had preached to the general satisfaction of the whole city, and was now about to take leave of his congregation with such rites and ceremonies as preachers commonly adopt. When it got about that this was the Father's farewell sermon, all folk flocked to the church, so that it seemed as if the day were one of plenary indulgence. So hot and stifling had the church become with the crowd and the breath of so many men and women, that when the sermon was over (it had lasted from dinner-time to four o'clock) the friars found it passing difficult to chant versers and compline together. Being a shrewd and thoughtful person, the sacristan opened all the doors and windows of the church to cool the air, waiting as long as he could before closing the great door, especially as at nightfall they were to bury there a man of very foul reputation, to whom, when dying, as all averred, the devil had appeared in the flesh, so that they thought he would be carried away, soul and body. When the

funeral rites for this arch-sinner were ended, the sacristan closed the central door of the church, but left the one leading to the first cloister open, so that the church might grow cooler during the night.

That same evening a friar arrived who had been preaching in the mountains, and brought his baggage with him upon a little ass as black as pitch, which he put up in a stable hard by. But, while all slept, the donkey, I know not how, got out of the stable and strayed into the cloister, where the grass was rich and tender. Here it stopped for a while to eat its fill. Then, being thirsty perhaps, it went sniffing about till it spied the vessel containing holy water, and drank it all up, as the friars next day discovered. Having eaten and drunk, it approached the grave of the wicked man, which had been filled in with sand, and, after turning round several times, stretched itself out there to rest.

Now, at the first stroke of matins, it is usual for novices to go to the choir and set books and candles in readiness for chanting the service. So, at the time stated, two boys came in to prepare all that was necessary, and, passing through the sacristy, they saw Master Jackass stretched out upon the grave. His eyes looked like two great burning coals, while his long ears seemed for all the world like a pair of horns. Darkness, that fosterer and ally of fear, the thought of the newly-buried sinner, and the sight of so horrible a brute at such an hour fairly robbed the poor timid lads of their senses, and they firmly believed that the beast was none other than the devil. So, in their terror, they fled as fast as their legs would carry them; and he who ran swiftest deemed himself very lucky. On reaching the dormitory, breathless and speechless, they met some of the friars going to the choir, among these being the master of the novices. Seeing by the light that burns all night long in the dormitory that the boys had come back, he asked them why they had not gone to prepare for matins, when in great fear and trembling they told him that on the grave of the man buried overnight they had actually seen the enemy of mankind.

The good monk, by no means the most courageous of men, began to tremble with fear, uncertain whether to go down into the church or not. Just then Fra Giovanni Mascarello came up, leader of the choir, and an excellent musician. Hearing the lads' story, he boldly ran down and went into the church. Here he saw the brute crouched on the grave, with ears erect because of the noise it heard, and quickly turning his back to it, he slammed the door of the sacristy and rushed upstairs, screaming at the top of his voice, "*Patres miei*, it is indeed the devil, the enemy of mankind." This he repeated again and again. As you know, he has a very powerful voice, and he shouted so loud that there was not a friar in the convent who did not hear him. At last the Prior came out of his cell, and, approaching Fra Giovanni, said, "What folly is this that you say? Are you raving mad, or what is it? Be still, and do not make such a noise at this hour. In God's name what is the matter?" "Holy Father," replied Fra Giovanni, "I am not raving mad, but I tell you that the devil is in the church, and with my own eyes I actually saw him on the grave of that wicked man whom we buried yester-eve. Methinks he has come to bear away the sinner's body with him to hell! These lads, here, have seen him also."

Having questioned the boys, who confirmed this statement, the Prior, with some of the monks whom the outcry had brought thither, went down into the church. Their imaginations being excited by what they had heard, at the sight of the ass they all firmly believed that it was the Prince of Devils. So, quaking with fear, each made the sign of the cross and went back to the sacristy, whereupon the Prior, after brief consultation with the friars, had the big bell rung, which brought all the inmates of the monastery together, when he exhorted them to be of good courage and not to dread this devilish apparition. Emboldened by this speech, the friars went in a body to the sacristy, where they donned their sacred vestments, and took all the relics they possessed, so that each bore some holy thing in his hand. Then, the cross going before, they marched forth in procession, chanting with great fervour the *Salve Re-*

gina. But Master Jackass remained completely at his ease through it all, never budging an inch from his self-chosen position. Few of the friars were brave enough to look at the brute, being firmly convinced that it was the devil, while none of them had the least idea that it was a donkey. When the *Salve Regina* had been sung and the beast showed no signs of moving, the Prior called for the book of exorcisms, which is used to drive out evil spirits from the bodies of those possessed, and he then read all those holy words which are meet on such emergencies, yet for all this master donkey never stirred.

At last the Prior took the sprinkler used for holy water, and coming somewhat closer to the brute he raised his hand, and making the sign of the cross, began to sprinkle holy water, never perceiving that the foul fiend of his imagination was none other than an ass. So he soused him soundly two or three times, when, either because the water was cold or because he thought the sprinkler stick would hit him (for he saw the Prior continually raise his hand as if about to beat him), Master Neddy stood up on all fours and brayed with hideous vigour. By this ludicrous signal he proved to the Prior and the monks that he was not Satan after all, but an ass. The good friars were filled with confusion, not knowing what to say nor what to do. But the whole thing ended in loud laughter, as it seemed to them a mighty joke that young and old, philosophers and theologians, should one and all have been thus mocked by an ass.

(III)

MAD JEALOUSY

(Translated by PERCY PINKERTON)

AT the time of that wise yet ill-starred prince Lodovico Sforza, there lived in a city of this duchy¹ a merchant of great wealth and great credit among his peers, who had taken to wife a young gentlewoman, well-mannered and sweet of temper, by whom he had one only child, a son. The boy had not reached the age of ten when his father died, leaving him in his mother's charge as heir to all the property. Being desirous that her son should keep close to the noble traditions of her ancestors, the mother would not have him put his hand to trade, but she brought him up most carefully in the study of letters and in those other exercises that go to the making of a thorough gentleman, while doing all she could meanwhile to complete her husband's outstanding negotiations with various houses of business in Flanders, Italy, France, Spain, and even in Syria, her intention being to buy property for her son, whose name was Galeazzo.

He grew up to be a gallant youth, courteous and full of spirit, with a taste not only for letters, but for music, riding, wrestling, tilting, and the like. This greatly delighted his mother, and she provided him most liberally with clothes, money, and horses, letting him want for nothing that should please him. In a few years she had paid off all her husband's debts, and had recovered such moneys as were due to him from other merchants, with the exception of one account

¹The duchy of Milan.

against a Venetian gentleman who traded in Syria, and, at the time when Galeazzo was about sixteen or seventeen years old, had returned to Venice.

Being wishful, as lads are, to see new countries, and particularly the famous and honoured city of Venice, he begged his mother to let him go thither. She, so far from being displeased at his wish, encouraged him to go, desiring him to settle the account still open with the Venetian gentleman aforesaid. So she sent him with her bailiff, a man of experience, commending him, moreover, to the care of one of the merchants in Venice who was a great friend of the family. Galeazzo accordingly set out, most properly equipped with clothes and servants.

On reaching Venice, he presented himself to his father's friend, who gladly welcomed him. They then went together to see the Venetian gentleman, who, on learning who Galeazzo was, and the cause of his coming, said, "My dear son, be welcome. It is true that, on working out my accounts, I find I am your debtor to the amount you state, and as calculated by your man of business. If I have not sooner settled this debt, at least by letters, it is because I only arrived here three days ago with the galleys from Syria. Now I am ready to satisfy you, but you will have to wait about eight or ten days, until I can go to Padua, where I have my wife and all my family." Galeazzo said that he was quite willing to wait, and would spend the time in seeing all the sights of Venice, which he did. Then they went to Padua together, and there was nothing for it but Galeazzo must lodge with the Venetian, to whose house he accordingly went, taking only a page as escort, the other serving-folk being sent to an inn. Having himself been an honoured guest of the young man's father, the Venetian sought to entertain Galeazzo to the very best of his power.

He had a daughter, fifteen years old, and passing fair. Galeazzo, who saw the girl constantly every day, and who had never yet known what sort of thing love was, grew deeply enamoured to her. As the lad pleased her, she did not avoid love's dart, but, aware of his passion, returned it a thousandfold ;

and matters reached such a pass that they soon managed to make the following plan : Her father was to pay over all the money to Galeazzo within three days and then return with him to Venice, where he had to stay for a while. Two days after his departure the damsel was to flee from home, in charge of Galeazzo's trusted servant, whom he pretended he was sending to his mother. In fact, the Venetian had despatched letters to her by him, but the good servant remained in hiding at Padua until the time fixed for flight.

Having got the money, Galeazzo went back with his host to Venice, and, acting on his advice, had the whole sum remitted to Milan by bills of exchange. In fact, he did nothing, and bought nothing, without first consulting him. All at once, the Venetian got news of his daughter's flight from Padua, and of their being unable to find any trace of her whereabouts. Grieved beyond measure, the good man determined to leave everything and return to Padua. Feigning to share in his sorrow at such misfortune, Galeazzo offered to go with him, and indeed to accompany him wherever he wished. The Venetian thanked him for his offer, and departed ; but, hearing nothing of Lucrezia, his missing daughter, he came back to Venice to find Galeazzo still there. Soon afterwards, the young man returned to his home in Lombardy, never daring to say a word to his mother about the girl that he had carried off.

The servant had, meantime, hired a suitable house, furnishing this as his master had instructed him, Galeazzo's nurse and her husband being put there as guardians to the girl. And here, to the marvellous pleasure of both concerned, Galeazzo culled of his Lucrezia the virgin flower and fruit. More did he love her than his very life, passing almost every night in her company, and spending large sums to procure her enjoyment.

Though Galeazzo's mother knew that he often supped and slept away from home, she said nothing, and for nearly three years the lovers led as joyous and merry a life as well might be. Then it so chanced that the mother thought of finding a wife for her son, but to this proposal he would never consent. She

suspected that he was probably enamoured of some other fair one, or that perhaps he had taken a wife after his own fashion; therefore she surrounded him with so many spies that she soon got to know of all that he had done at Padua. The news greatly annoyed her; and one evening, when Galeazzo was supping with his cousin, she contrived to have Lucrezia carried off by three masked men and placed in a nunnery that very night. Having finished supper, Galeazzo was for going to sleep with his mistress, when the nurse and her husband told him, between their sobs, that Lucrezia had been gagged by three masked men, who had carried her off. He was like to die of grief at the news, and all night long he wept bitterly.

Early in the morning he went to his mother's house and locked himself up in his room, remaining all day without food. During that time his mother made no inquiry as to her son, but on the following day, seeing that he would not dine, she went to him in his chamber, when he begged her to leave him alone in peace. She asked to know the cause for his grief, but he only answered her with sighs and tears. Thereupon, being touched to pity, she spoke as follows: "Dear son of mine, I could never have believed that you would hide aught from me in this world, but thought that you would have shown me all your troubles. However, I find myself much mistaken. Yet, thanks to my watchfulness, I have found out the cause of your sorrow. I know that you love Lucrezia, whom you carried off from her father's house in Padua. If that was a gallant deed, I leave you to consider, but the time has now come for help, not for punishment. Take heart of grace, and see to it that you recover your health and well-being. Lucrezia shall be yours again. I had her lodged in a monastery, thinking that if you found her not you would please me by taking a wife, as you ought to do."

Hearing this, Galeazzo seemed to be called back from death to life, and with shame he confessed to his mother that he loved Lucrezia far more than his own life, beseeching her to let the girl be brought to him forthwith. She urged him to have

patience just for that day, and sought to revive him with food and drink, promising to fetch the girl to him on the morrow.

What shall we say ? At this simple promise, Galeazzo, who but now was like to die, having lost sleep and appetite through grief, became wholly comforted. He dined ; and, when evening came, took supper, while the hope of regaining his Lucrezia gave him a calm restful night.

No sooner had he risen next day than he besought his mother to send for Lucrezia, so, to please her son, she drove in a little cart to the monastery and brought the girl away with her. When the two lovers met, they flung their arms about each other's necks, and in a close embrace shed hot salt tears for very joy. After countless kisses and endearments, Galeazzo, still weeping, asked Lucrezia, "Say, sweetheart, how did you do without me ? What sort of life was yours ? Did it not grieve you sore never to see me all this while ? In truth, I thought I should die, nor can I rightly tell why still I live. Ah ! life of my life, who shall assure me that others, in this time of your absence from me, have not enjoyed your beauty ? Jealousy is like to kill me, and my very heart is broken within my body. As then, O heart of mine, we may but die once, and escape this dire trouble, it is far better that we die together, and end all these our doubts at a single blow." So saying, he took a dagger from his belt, and stabbed the girl to the heart, so that she straightway fell down dead. Then he turned the bloody steel against himself, and, plunging it into his breast, sank down at Lucrezia's side.

Great was the noise of weeping in that house, and the hapless mother's desperate lamentations rent the sky. All that day Galeazzo lingered ; and, when the sun went down, he died. Deaf to all comfortings, the mother passionately bewailed her dead son ; indeed, she merited great pity and compassion, for her story might e'en draw tears from stones, to say nothing of you, gentle, tender-hearted ladies, whose beauteous eyes, as I see, are filled with tears. To keep matters hidden, the lovers were buried secretly, it being given out that they had died of the plague, for at that time there was some suspicion of that

disease in Milan, and, moreover, the doctors took bribes to declare this to be so. Yet they could not conceal the facts so closely but that in time they were completely known. Who, then, shall deny that jealousy is a noisome reptile which blinds men's eyes, if in sooth this of Galeazzo's was jealousy, and not rather madness and fury?



GIAN FRANCESCO STRAPAROLA

(First half of 16th Century)



A WILL

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

I N Como, a little city of Lombardy, not very far from Milan, there once dwelt a citizen of the name of Andrigetto da Sabbia, whose immense possessions, surpassing those of any other individual, did not, however, prevent him from adding to them by every means in his power. Being perfectly secure against the attacks of conscience in all his dealings, he was never known to suffer remorse for the most unjustifiable actions. He was in the habit of disposing of the produce of his large estates to the poorer citizens and peasantry, instead of selling it to merchants and others, who could command ready money ; not from any charitable motives, but in order to obtain possession of their little remaining property, still uniting field after field to the great possessions he had already acquired. It happened that so great a scarcity began to prevail in the city and its vicinity, that many persons actually perished of want, while numbers had recourse to our old usurer for assistance ; to whom, from the urgent pressure of circumstances, they were compelled to make over, in return for the necessities of life, such interest as they might possess, either in houses or lands. The concourse of people in his neighbourhood was so great as almost to resemble a jubilee or a public

fair. Now there was a certain notary, Tonisto Raspante by name, a most notorious and wily practitioner of his art, and more successful than any other of his brethren in emptying the pockets of the poor villagers. He had still, however, so much regard for an ancient law in Como, relating to usurious contracts, which required the money lent to be counted in the presence of proper witnesses, as to refuse to draw up such instruments as Andrigetto often directed him to prepare, observing that they were altogether against the form of the statute, and he would not venture to risk the penalty. But such were the overbearing manners of the old miser, and so great was his authority in the city, that sometimes threatening him with ruin, and at other times bribing him to his purpose, he compelled the attorney to obey his commands. The time for confessing himself being at hand, before presenting himself at the confessional, Andrigetto took care to send to the priest an excellent dinner, with as much of the finest cloth as would make a pair of hose for himself and his servant, announcing at the same time his intention to confess on the ensuing day, when he thought that he was sure of meeting with a favourable hearing. The priest undertook with pleasure the task of absolving from his sins so eminent and rich a citizen, and received his penitent with the utmost cordiality. Andrigetto fell on his knees before his spiritual father, accusing himself with very little ceremony of various sins and errors, not forgetting his usurious and illegal contracts, all which he recounted in the most minute manner. The priest, who had sense enough to perceive the enormous nature of his offences, conceiving himself bound to make some representations on the subject, ventured certain gentle hints on the impropriety of their repetition, and in the meanwhile strongly recommending restitution to the injured parties. Instead of taking this in good part, Andrigetto turned very sharply round upon his confessor, observing that he was at a loss to understand what he meant, and that he had better go, and return no more, until he had learned how to confess persons in a more rational manner. The priest, owing his preferment in a great measure

to Andrigetto, and fearful lest he might lose his favour altogether, began to retract as well as he could, gave him absolution, and then imposing as slight a penance as possible, received a florin for his reward, after which Andrigetto took his leave in very excellent spirits.

Not long after this interview, our old usurer, while rejoicing in this absolution from all his sins, fell ill of a mortal distemper, and the physicians shortly despaired of his life. His friends and relatives having gathered round his bed, took the liberty of suggesting that it was now time to think of a sincere confession, to receive his last spiritual consolation, and make a final arrangement of his affairs, like a good Catholic and a Christian. But the old gentleman, having hitherto devoted all his thoughts and exertions, both day and night, to the hoarding of his wealth, instead of being at all impressed by the awfulness of his situation, only replied with great levity to their arguments : still amusing himself with arranging the most trifling concerns, and evincing not the least uneasiness at his approaching end. After long entreaties and persuasions, he was at last prevailed upon to comply with their request, and agreed to summon to his assistance his old agent Tonisto Raspante, the notary, and father Neofito, his confessor.

On the arrival of these personages, they addressed the patient with a cheerful countenance, telling him to keep up his spirits, for that with God's help he would soon be a sound man again. Andrigetto only replied that he feared he was too far gone for that, and that he had perhaps better lose no time in first settling his worldly affairs, and then arranging his ghostly concerns with his confessor. But the good priest, exhorting and comforting him to the best of his ability, advised him first of all to place his sole trust in the Lord, humbly submitting himself to his will, as the safest means of obtaining a restoration to health. To this, however, Andrigetto replied only by ordering seven respectable men to be called in as witnesses of his nuncupative last will and testament. These individuals having been successively presented to the patient, and taken their seats, he proceeded to inquire from his friend Tonisto,

the very lowest charge which he was in the habit of making for penning a will. "According to the strict rules of the profession," replied Tonisto, "it is only a florin ; but in general the amount is decided by the feelings of the testator." "Well, well, then," cried the patient, "take two florins ; and set down what I tell you." The notary having invoked the divine name, drew out the preliminaries in the usual manner ; bequeathing the body of the testator to the earth, and his soul to the hands of God who gave it, with humble thanks for the many favours vouchsafed by Him to His unworthy creature. This exordium being read to Andrigetto, he flew into a violent rage, and commanded the notary to write down nothing but his own words, which he dictated as follows : "I, Andrigetto da Sabbia, being of sound mind, though infirm of body, do hereby declare this to be my last will and testament : I give and bequeath my soul into the hands of the great Satan, the prince of devils." Hearing these words, the witnesses stood aghast ; Raspante's quill started from the paper, and in evident horror and perturbation he stopped. Looking the testator very earnestly in the face, he interposed : "Ah ! Messer Andrigetto, these are the words of a madman !" "How !" exclaimed Andrigetto, in a violent passion, "what do you mean ? How dare you stop ? Write word for word as I direct you, and nothing more ; or you shall never be paid for a will of mine : proceed, I tell you." Struck with the greatest horror and surprise, his friends attempted to remonstrate with him, lamenting that he should make use of language so opposite to his usual good sense, language which only madmen or blasphemers could be capable of using on such a subject, and in so awful a situation as his. "Desist, then," they continued, "for heaven's sake, and consult your honour and the safety of your poor soul. Think of the scandal such a proceeding would bring upon your family, if you, who were esteemed so prudent and so wise, were to make yourself an example of all that is perfidious, ungrateful, and impious towards heaven."

But Andrigetto paid no further attention to their reproaches than by observing that his business was with his attorney, and

that, as he had not yet finished his will, they had better take care what they were about ; on which there was soon a respectful silence throughout the room. He then turned towards his attorney, requesting to know, in a voice of suppressed passion, whether he was prepared to go on, as he had already offered to pay double the usual charge for his labours. Apprehensive that Andrigetto might expire before he had made a disposition of his property, the notary promised to do as he was required, more especially when he heard the patient beginning to hiccup with the violence of his emotions ; so that he was compelled to make a solemn vow to fulfil his client's instructions.

"Item," continued Andrigetto, "I hereby bequeath the wretched soul of my wicked agent Tonisto Raspante to the great Satan, in order that it may keep company with mine when it leaves this world, as it shortly must." "The Lord have mercy on me !" cried the poor attorney, shocked at the deep solemnity with which these last words were uttered, "the Lord have mercy on my soul !" and the pen dropped from his hand. "Recall," he continued, "my honoured patron, recall those wicked words ; do anything but destroy my eternal interests, my last, my dearest hopes." "Go on, you rogue," cried the testator, "and do not venture to interrupt me again ; do not tell me about your soul. You have your pay, and that is enough ; so proceed quickly as I shall direct you. I leave my said attorney's soul to the devil, for this reason ; that if he had not consented to draw up so many false and usurious contracts, but had driven me from his presence as soon as I proposed them, I should not now find myself reduced to the sad extremity of leaving both our souls to the king of hell, owing entirely to his shameful cupidity and want of common honesty." The attorney, though trembling at the name of the king of hell, yet fearful lest his patron might enter into further particulars far from creditable to him, wrote as he was commanded.

"Item," continued the patient, "I bequeath the soul of father Neofito, my confessor, into the claws of Lucifer ; aye, to thirty

thousand pair of devils." "Stop, Messer Andrigetto, pray stop," cried the priest ; "and do not think of applying those dreadful words to me. You ought to put your trust in the Lord, in the Lord Jesus, whose mercies always abound, who came to save sinners, and is still inviting them, night and day, to repentance. He died for our sins, and for your sins, Messer Andrigetto ; you have only to beseech pardon, and all will yet be well. The road is still open to restitution ; hasten to make restitution then ; for the Lord does not wish the death of a sinner. You have great wealth ; remember the Church ; you will have Masses said for your soul, and may yet sit in the seats of paradise." "Oh, thou wicked and most wretched priest," retorted the patient, "by thy vile avarice and simony, thou hast helped thine own soul, as well as mine, into the pit of perdition. And dost thou now think of advising me to repent ? Confusion on thy villainy ! Write, notary, that I bequeath his soul to the very centre of the place of torments ; for had it not been for his bold and shameless conduct in absolving me from my numerous and repeated offences, I should not now find myself in the strange predicament in which I am placed. What ! does the rogue think it would be now just to restore my evil-gotten gains, and thus leave my poor family destitute ? No, no ; I am not quite such a fool as to do that ; so please to go on. Item. To my dear lady Felicia, I leave my pretty farm, situated in the district of Comacchio, in order to supply herself with the elegancies of life, and occasionally treat her lovers as she has been hitherto in the habit of doing, thus preparing the way further to oblige me with her company in the other world ; sharing with us the torments of eternity. The remainder of my property, as well personal as real, with all future interest and proceeds accruing thereon, I leave to my two legitimate and beloved sons, Commodo and Torquato, on condition that they give nothing for a single Mass to be said for the soul of the deceased, but that they feast, swear, game, and fight, to the best of their ability, in order that they may the sooner waste their substance so wickedly acquired ; until driven to despair, they may as speedily as possible hang them-

selves. And this I declare to be my last will and testament, as witness all present, not forgetting my attorney." Having signed this instrument, and put his seal to it, Andrigetto turned away his face, and uttering a terrific howl, finally surrendered his impenitent soul to Pluto.

GIOVANNI GRAZZINI ("il Lasca")
(1503-1584)



(I)

A FISHERMAN'S FORTUNE

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

WE learn from ancient accounts of Pisa that it was formerly esteemed one of the most wealthy and powerful cities, not only of Tuscany but of all Italy, and celebrated for the courage and activity of its inhabitants. It happened that, a considerable time previous to its subjugation by the Florentine republic, a certain Milanese doctor, who had been studying medicine at Paris, came, for a short time, to take up his residence there. During his stay, he met with such uncommon success in his practice among the citizens, several of whom he had snatched from the very jaws of destruction, that with fees and reputation increasing upon him so fast, he scarcely thought himself justified in leaving a place to the customs and manners of whose inhabitants he was already becoming attached. He therefore felt inclined to abandon his native city altogether, and very shortly ceased even to think that there was such a place as Milan in the world. For he had heard, only a few days before his arrival at Pisa, that his aged mother, the sole relation whom he had left behind, had departed this life. So he believed that he could do nothing better than continue where he was, and at no distant period, by his industry and success, he amassed a considerable fortune, took an elegant

house, and assumed the dignified title of Maestro Basilio da Milano.

Soon after, he had the pleasure of having it frequently hinted to him by several respectable Pisanese, that the honour of his alliance would, by no means, be unacceptable to them, and many were the young beauties who passed in review before him. Yet he at length fixed his eyes upon a young lady, both of whose parents were deceased, and who, though not rich, was of a good family. She brought the doctor little more as her wedding portion than the house she lived in, though she afterwards presented him with a large family ; and for many years, increasing in wealth, they lived extremely happily together. By this lady he had three sons and a daughter, the latter of whom, as well as one of her brothers, their parents very happily bestowed in marriage, when they became old enough to settle in the world. The youngest boy had a decided taste for letters, while the second, who gave his parents great anxiety, was of an extremely dull and obstinate disposition, with a great aversion to learning and every species of improvement ; morose, abstracted, and unamiable, when his negative was once pronounced, it was as unalterable as his own nature. The doctor at last finding that he could mould him into nothing, to get rid of him, sent him into the country, where he had purchased, at least, half a dozen different estates, and whither he was fond of retiring to escape the continued noise and turbulence of the city. But about ten years after he had despatched his son Lazzaro, for this was the fool's name, into this retreat, there arose a dreadful malady in Pisa, which carried off numbers of people, in a violent fever, which subsiding into a deep lethargy, they awakened no more, and it was moreover as infectious as the plague. The doctor, desirous of shewing his skill, and taking the lead of the other physicians on this occasion, exposed himself so fearlessly for his fees, that he took the infection, which soon set at defiance every application of his most esteemed syrups and recipes, and in a few hours he retired from the profession for ever. Nor was this all, for he communicated the disease to his family, and

one after another they all died, until there was only an old nurse left alive in the house.

It was, indeed, a dreadful visitation upon all Pisa, and the mortality would have been still greater, had not the survivors fled in haste from the city. With the change of season, however, its severity seemed to mitigate, the persons attacked gradually recovered, the inhabitants returned to their houses, and the people resumed their usual occupations.

It was now that Lazzaro succeeded to all the property left by his deceased relations, though he merely added a single domestic to the reduced establishment of his father, consisting of the old servant. His farms and the receipt of his rents were left in the care of an agent, as he bestowed no attention upon business. Many families, notwithstanding, appeared anxious for the honour of his alliance, without making the slightest objection to his rusticity and folly ; but the only answer that he uniformly returned to these proposals was, that he had made up his mind to wait for at least four years, and that he afterwards might, perhaps, be induced to think of it. As he was known never to have changed his mind, no one importuned him further upon the subject. Though he was fond of amusements in his own way, he admitted no one to his confidence, and started on beholding a card of invitation like a guilty spirit at the sign of the cross.

Opposite to his house there resided a man of the name of Gabriello, with his wife and two children, a boy about five years old, and a little girl, whom he supported as well as he was able, by his skill in bird-catching and fishing. Though his abode was humble, his nets and cages were of the very best construction, and he managed them so judiciously, that with the assistance of his wife, Santa, who had the reputation of an excellent sempstress, he made a very pretty livelihood. It happened that Gabriello was an exact counterpart, in voice, countenance, and appearance, of our foolish friend Lazzaro ; their very complexion and their beards were of the same cut and quality. If they were not twin brothers, they ought to have been so, for they were not only of the same age and

stature, but in their taste and manners they greatly resembled each other. It would have been impossible even for the fisherman's wife to have recognised Lazzaro, disguised in the dress of her husband ; the only distinction that could be made was, that one was dressed as a labourer and the other like a gentleman. Pleased with the happy resemblance which he could not but acknowledge between himself and the fisherman, and fancying it laid him under a sort of obligation for which he felt grateful, he began to solicit his acquaintance. This he did in the pleasantest manner possible, frequently sending him good things from his table, and a bottle of old wine. The fisherman's gratitude was so pleasing that he soon also sent for him to dine and sup with him, passing the evenings in the most agreeable conversations imaginable ; the adventures of the good fisherman, and the prodigious lies he told, being a never-failing source of admiration and delight to Lazzaro. For the fisherman's skill extended far beyond his art, and the rogue contrived to insinuate himself into the good graces of his patron, until the latter was hardly ever easy out of his company.

Thus, having one day treated his rustic friend to a noble feast, they began to talk, over their wine, of the various modes of fishing, all of which were explained greatly to the satisfaction of the host. None, however, seemed to take his fancy so much as the description of the diving net, on which the fisherman dwelt with uncommon enthusiasm, as the most useful and delightful invention in the world. It inspired Lazzaro with the ambition of immediately witnessing a specimen of this part of the piscatorial art, in which great fish may be caught, not with nets and lines merely, but with the very mouth, a drag-net hanging round the neck of the diving fisherman ! "Oh, let us go now ! let us go now !" exclaimed the happy Lazzaro, while the guest, as usual, expressed himself ready to attend his patron. As it happened to be the middle of summer, nothing could be better ; and finishing their dessert, Gabriello took his drag-nets, and they went out together. They bent their way through the Porta a Mare,

directly towards the Arno, along the fence of pales, above the great bank crowned with alder-trees, spreading a most delicious shade. There the fisherman begged his patron to sit down and refresh himself while he observed the manner in which he should proceed. Having first stripped himself, he bound the nets round his arms and neck, and then boldly plunging into the river, down he went. But being a complete adept at his business, he rose again very shortly to the surface, bringing up with him at one drag eight or ten great fish, all of the best kind. This was a real miracle in the eyes of Lazzaro, who could not divine how he could possibly see to catch them under water, and he resolved to ascertain the manner in which it was done. With this view, being a hot July day, and thinking that a cold bath might refresh him, he prepared, with Gabriello's assistance, to step in. He was conducted by him to a shallow part, and when about up to his knees, Gabriello left him to his own discretion ; only warning him that, though the bottom shelved down very gradually, he had better go no further than where a certain post rose above the rest, and pointing it out to him once more, he pursued his business. Lazzaro felt singular pleasure in being thus left to himself, and splashing about, performed all sorts of antics in the water. His eyes were often fixed in admiration upon his friend Gabriello, who every now and then rose from the bottom with a fish in his mouth, the better to please his patron, who at this sight could no longer restrain his applause.

"It is very plain now," he cried, "that it must be light under water, or he could never have seen how to catch that fish in his mouth, besides all the others in his net ; I wish I knew how." So saying, the next time that he saw Gabriello dive, he imitated the motion by ducking his head, and at the same time losing his footing, slipped gently down, till he not only reached the post, but passed it with his head still under water. When he fairly got out of his depth, still trying whether he could see, it appeared a strange thing to him ; for he found he could no longer get his breath, and he endeavoured in vain to fight his way up again, the water pouring in at his mouth and ears, at

his nose and eyes, in such a way that he could see nothing. In short, the current at length catching him, bore him away in perfect amazement, and he was too far gone to cry out for help. Gabriello was in the meantime employed in diving down into a large hole he had discovered near the stakes, full of fish, which he was handing into his net with the greatest alacrity ; while his poor friend and patron was already more than half dead, having now come up and gone down again for the third time, and at the fourth he rose no more.

Just at this moment, Gabriello, with a prodigious draught, again appeared, and turning round with a joyous face to look at Lazzaro, what was his surprise and terror when he found his master was gone ! Gazing round with the hope of perceiving him somewhere, he only found his clothes just as he had left them. In the utmost alarm he ran again to the water, and in a short time discovered his body thrown by the current on the opposite bank. He swam to the place, and on perceiving that his good patron was quite cold and lifeless, he stood for some moments like a statue, overpowered with grief and terror, without knowing how to act. In the first place he was afraid, if he published the tidings of his death, of being accused of having drowned him, to plunder him of his money, an idea which threw him into such alarm that, covering his face with his hands, he stood buried in profound grief and reflection. At length he suddenly uttered an exclamation of joy, as the thought rushed into his mind, "I am safe, I am safe ; there are no witnesses of the accident, and I know what I will do : it is the hour when luckily everybody is asleep." With these words he thrust the nets and the fish into his great basket, and taking the dead body of Lazzaro on his shoulders, heavy as it was, he placed it among some wet reeds hard by the shore. He then bound the nets round his poor friend's arms, and again bearing him to the water, he contrived to fasten the strings in such a way round one of the deepest stakes, that they could with difficulty be withdrawn, giving the body the appearance of having been thus entangled while fishing. He then assumed his patron's attire, and got even into his very

shoes, and sat down quietly on the bank, resolved to try what fortune would do for him. His strong resemblance to his deceased friend, if successful, would now not only save his life, but make it ever after, as he believed, most happy and comfortable. As the hour seemed now arrived, with equal skill and courage he entered upon the dangerous experiment, and began to call out lustily for help in the person of poor Lazzaro: "Help ! help, good people, or the poor fisherman will be drowned ! Oh, he comes up no more !" and with this, he roared out tremendously. The miller was the first man who reached the spot ; but numbers of people were gathering on all sides to learn what could possibly cause such an insufferable noise. Gabriello continued to bellow, even some time after they arrived, the better to counterfeit his patron, weeping the whole time, as he told his tale ; how the poor fisherman had dipped, and brought up fish so often ; but the last time he had stopped nearly an hour under water, and having waited for him in vain, he began to be afraid he was coming up no more. The people inquiring, with a smile at his simplicity, whereabouts it was, he pointed out the spot, on which the miller, who was a great friend of Gabriello's, began to strip, and plunged into the river. And there, sure enough, as he believed, he found his friend Gabriello, caught in his own net, and entangled fast by his neck and heels to the unlucky stake.

"Heaven have mercy on us !" cried the miller, "here he is, poor Gabriello, poor Gabriello ! quite drowned, in his own entangled net :" using his utmost efforts at the same time to loosen it from about the stake. Such were the lamentations of Gabriello's friends on hearing this, that he could scarcely refrain from betraying himself. Two more threw themselves into the water to assist the miller, and at length, with some difficulty, they fished the body out. The arms and legs were all entangled in the net, and his relations in their indignation tore the unlucky cords to tatters. The tidings of his death being spread abroad, a priest immediately attended, and the body was borne upon a bier to the nearest church, where it

was laid out, in order to be recognised by Gabriello's friends. His disconsolate widow, accompanied by other relations, bewailing him and her children, now hastened to the spot. Believing the body to be his, a scene of tender affliction ensued. After beating her breast and tearing her hair, she sat down and wept with her little children, while every one around, and above all the real Gabriello, could not restrain their tears. So overpowered, indeed, was he by his feelings, that pulling his poor patron's hat over his brows, and hiding his face in his pocket-handkerchief, he addressed his wife before all the people, in a hoarse and piteous voice : "Come, good woman, do not despair, do not cry so. I will provide for you, and take care both of you and your children ; the poor man lost his life in trying to amuse me, and I shall not forget it. He was a clever fisherman ; but leave off crying, I tell you I will provide for you. So go home, and go in peace, for you shall want for nothing while I live, and when I die I will leave you what is handsome ;" and this he ended with a kind of growl, intended to express his concern both for her and the deceased fisherman. For these words he was highly applauded by all the people present, while the imaginary widow, somewhat consoled by his promises, was conveyed back by her relations to her own dwelling. But Gabriello in his new character immediately marched and took possession of Lazzaro's house, walking in exactly as he had often observed his poor friend was wont to do, without noticing any one. He went into a richly furnished chamber, overlooking some beautiful gardens, and taking the keys out of his deceased patron's pockets, he began to search the trunks and boxes, where he found other lesser keys, which admitted him to all the treasures and valuables in the place. It was a storehouse of wealth indeed, for it not only contained the fortunes of the deceased doctor and other relations of Lazzaro, to the amount of several thousand florins of gold ; but was equally rich in jewels and plate. At the sight of these, Gabriello repressed with difficulty loud exclamations of rapture and surprise, and he sat down to devise fresh means of supporting his title to Lazzaro's

estates. With this view, being perfectly acquainted with his late friend's character, he went down about supper time, uttering the most strange and wild exclamations of grief. The two servants of the house, who had heard of the fatal accident, and the cause of it, ran hastily to his relief. But instead of listening to their consolation, he directly ordered six loaves, and a portion of the supper, with two flasks of wine, to be carried to the disconsolate widow across the way. On the return of the domestic, with the poor widow's grateful thanks, Gabriello partook of a light supper, set out in the handsomest style, and without saying a word to any one, shut himself up in his chamber, and went to bed. There he remained until the hour of nine the next morning, in order the better to indulge his reflections and his grief. Though the difference between his voice and language, and those of their former master, was perceptible to his domestics, they attributed it entirely to his violent sorrow for his deceased friend. And the poor widow, finding how well he seemed inclined to keep his word of supporting her and her children, very soon dismissed the condolences of her relations, and retired as usual quietly to rest. The next day Gabriello began to rise at his old friend's usual hour, and though he had now a variety of cares upon his hands, he never permitted the poor widow, Santa, to want for anything. He imitated his late patron's way of life very exactly, for he really seemed to have also succeeded to his indolence, which he adopted without an effort. He was still, however, extremely concerned to hear that his wife's grief for his death continued unabated ; though he certainly felt flattered by it, and began to think in what way he could console her, and how he could contrive means to marry her again. Feeling not a little puzzled upon the subject, he resolved to go to her house, where he found her, accompanied by one of her cousins ; it not being long since the period of his supposed death. Having informed her that he wished to speak to her upon an affair of some importance, her kind relation immediately took his leave, aware of the numerous obligations which her rich neighbour had so charitably con-

ferred upon her. When he had left them, Gabriello closed the door with the same air of familiarity and confidence as formerly, at which the poor woman could not help testifying some surprise, fearful lest he might presume too far upon the services he had rendered her. When Gabriello advanced, taking her little boy by the hand, she drew back timidly, at which action he could not help expressing his admiration of his wife's propriety, in an audible voice, and with a grin of delight. Then taking her by the hand, he spoke to her in his accustomed manner, and she gazed for a moment doubtfully in his face ; while Gabriello, taking his little boy in his arms, tenderly caressed him, saying, "What, boy, is your mother weeping at our good fortune?" and shaking some money in his hand with a triumphant air, he gave it to him, and went on playing with him as usual. But perceiving that his wife was overpowered with a variety of emotions which she could not control, unable longer to disguise the truth, he first fastened the door, and fearful lest any one might overhear the strange story he had to reveal, he drew her into an inner chamber, and there related the whole affair just as it had passed. It is impossible to convey an idea of her surprise and joy, as she hung weeping upon his neck. But they were delicious tears, and her husband kissed them away, with far greater rapture than he had ever before felt : and they sank overpowered with emotion into each other's arms.

It was necessary, however, to use the utmost precaution in retaining the fortune they had so strangely won : and after explaining the plans he had in view, and engaging his wife's promise to keep the matter secret, Gabriello returned to his new house. His wife still affecting to retain her grief for his loss, frequently took care, before all her neighbours, to recommend her poor children to the gentleman's notice, who uniformly treated them with kindness.

The ensuing night he lay broad awake, devising how he might best put his future plans into execution. Having at length resolved, he rose early, and bent his way to the church of Santa Catterina, where he knew a venerable and devout

monk, almost worshipped by the good people of Pisa, whose name was Fra Anselmo. He here announced a very strange and important piece of business, respecting which he wished to consult the conscience of the learned friar. The good father carried him into his cell, where Gabriello introduced himself as Lazzaro di Maestro Basilio da Milano, relating at the same time his whole family genealogy, and how he had remained sole heir of the whole property, owing to the late plague. He at last came to the story of poor Gabriello, the fisherman, laying the sole blame of the accident upon himself, in persuading the wretched man to accompany him in a fishing excursion along the Arno. He then proceeded to relate the deplorable circumstances in which he had left his family ; and taking into serious consideration the cause of the calamity, he felt it weigh so heavily upon his conscience that he was resolved at all risks to make every reparation in his power. But what reparation could be made to a woman who, however lowly her condition, had fondly loved her husband, except by consoling her for her loss by directing her affections towards another object. "And the truth is," he continued, "I am willing to marry her, and become a father to her children, and then," he continued with the greatest simplicity, "perhaps God will forgive me for the great sin I committed in taking him out a fishing with me." Though the pious father here smiled, it appeared so conscientious a proposal that he did not venture to oppose it, saying, that he would not fail, in this way, to obtain the mercy of heaven upon many of his past sins. Hearing this comfortable doctrine, Gabriello opened his purse-strings, and presented the friar with thirty pieces, observing that he wished the Mass of San Gregorio to be sung for three Mondays together, to insure peace to the soul of the deceased fisherman. The venerable monk's eyes brightened at the sight, and he promised Mass should be sung the very next Monday. With respect to the projected alliance, he observed to Gabriello that he rather praised him for his disregard to wealth and nobility in the proposed union. "Make no account of it," he continued ; "you will be rich enough in the grace of

heaven: we all belong to the same father and the same mother, and virtue is the only true nobility. I know both her and her parents ; you could not do better, for she is born of a good family. So, go home, my good signor, and I will attend you when you please.”—“Well, to-day, to-day, then !” cried Gabriello, as he prepared to depart. “Ah, leave it to me,” returned the friar, “and take my blessing with you, my son, and bring the ring in the meantime.” Gabriello hastened home, and purchased the ring accordingly, persuading himself there could be no harm in making sure that everything was quite correct in the difficult circumstances under which he laboured. So, with the consent of all the lady’s friends and relations, the marriage was celebrated a second time. Gabriello, in the person of Lazzaro, then conducted his wife to her new house, where a splendid feast was prepared, and all their friends met to receive them. Soon after, Gabriello gradually assuming the manners of a gentleman, dismissed the old maid and man-servant, with liberal gratuities, and set up a handsome equipage and noble establishment. He astonished all Lazzaro’s friends with the striking improvement that had taken place in the simpleton’s manners, while his wife, Santa, became exceedingly genteel in all her actions. The twice married pair spent together a tranquil and happy life ; and had two sons subsequently born, who, assuming a new family surname, called themselves de’ Fortunati ; and from these children sprung a race of men renowned both in letters and in arms.

(II)

*THE TRAGIC STORY OF FAZIO*¹

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

N o sooner had the lovely Galatea brought her very pleasing and applauded little story to a conclusion, than Leandro, looking round upon us with a mild and joyous air, in his turn began : Since it is my fate, fair ladies, and you, enamoured youths, to recount, under the feigned name you have given me (for, alas ! he who once bore it breathed his spirit on the cold waves, while struggling to reach the haven of his love) ; I must even, however unwillingly, persevere in rehearsing the sad mischances which have befallen such as believed themselves the happiest of lovers. Of this the following tale will afford but too grievous an example, filling your gentle hearts with dismay as we proceed, and from the eyes of beauty drawing unbidden tears. And what, though the scene of sorrow belonged neither to Greece, nor prouder Rome, neither to those of lofty lineage nor of royal stock, it was such as may serve to show that tragic terrors will sometimes lay desolate the humblest hearths, as well as strike the proud and golden palaces of kings. It may show too, that a single woman, neither born a princess nor bred a queen, will suffice, when scorned, to bring down woeful ruin upon herself and her whole family.

Listen to me then kindly, while I tell you, that in the annals of Pisa is found the name of Guglielmo Grimaldi, who came to settle in Pisa from the confines of Genoa. He was then a youth of about two-and-twenty, with very few resources, and living in a hired apartment ; yet with saving habits, and some

¹This very tragic story has long been a favourite subject of imitation, no less with the Italians than with the writers of other nations.

ability, he was at length enabled to lend little sums of money upon usury. And in this way, by hoarding his gains, while he spent little, he became in no very long time a rich man, without losing his desire of adding to his wealth. He lived alone, and with the most unremitting diligence and secrecy, amassed and concealed his increasing stores until, growing old at length, he found himself in possession of thousands, of which he would not have parted with a single crown to save the life of a friend, or to redeem the whole world from eternal punishment. On this account he was detested by all his fellow citizens, and paid dearly enough for it in the end.

Having one evening supped out with some of his miserly acquaintance, he was returning late to his own house, when he was assaulted by an unknown hand, and feeling himself wounded in the breast, he cried out and fled for help.

Just at this moment came on a terrific storm of hail, and wind, and thunder, which increased his distress, and compelled him to look out for shelter. Becoming faint from the loss of blood, he ran into the first house that he found open, belonging to one Fazio, a goldsmith, attracted by the blaze of a large fire, at which he, the said Fazio, was making chemical experiments, having for some time past devoted the whole of his earnings to these pursuits, attempting to convert the dull metals of lead and tin into fine silver or gold. For this purpose had he now made so glorious an illumination that he was compelled to open the door to admit air while he melted down his metals; but hearing the sound of footsteps, he turned round and beheld Guglielmo Grimaldi, the miser.

"What are you doing here, friend," he inquired, "at such an hour, and in such a night as this?" "Alas!" answered the miser, "I am ill; I have been attacked and wounded; I know not why, nor by whom": and he had no sooner uttered these words than he sat down and died upon the spot.

Fazio was greatly surprised and alarmed on beholding him fall dead at his feet, and opening his bosom to receive air, he tried to recall him to life, believing at first that the poor miser was dying of pure exhaustion and inanition, by denying

himself food. But on discovering the wound in his breast, and finding that his pulse no longer beat, he concluded that his visitor had really departed this life. Running to the door, he was about to alarm the neighbourhood, when hearing the terrific raging of the storm, he again drew back, and sought refuge in his house. Now his wife Pippa, and twin boys, happened just at this time to be on a visit to his father-in-law, who was likewise about to take his leave of the world. Instead of calling a physician, then, he suddenly changed his measures, and closed the door : examining next the body of the deceased, he found only four florins in his purse. Then, hid in a heap of old rags, he discovered a great bunch of keys, which, from their appearance, belonged to the house and chambers, the chests and strong boxes, of the miser ; who, if report were true, had hoarded up immense wealth, especially in ready cash, secured in his own house.

The moment the idea flashed across Fazio's mind, being of a keen and penetrating genius, he determined to turn it to his own account, and to aim a bold stroke at fortune, whatever were the event. "Why not hasten," he said, "to his stronghold at once ? I am sure to find it in his house, without a living creature near to say me nay. Why not transport it quietly, I say, into my own dwelling ? I think no one will hinder me, such a night as it is, thundering as if the sky would fall ! Besides, it is past midnight, and every living soul is either sheltering or asleep. I am alone here too, and the assassin of the poor miser must, by this time, I think, have taken to flight, without stopping to see where he took refuge. So, if I can only keep my own counsel, who will ever suspect that Grimaldi the miser ran into my house thus grievously wounded, and died ? This is surely then an unlooked-for blessing ; and were I to go about, telling the real truth, who knows whether I should be believed ? People might say I had robbed and murdered him, and I should infallibly be taken and put to the question ; and how should I be able to clear myself ? I dread to encounter the ministers of justice, for most probably I should never come alive out of their hands. What therefore will be the best ?

Why, Fortune is said to aid the bold ; bold then will I be, and try to rescue myself at once from a lot of penury and pain." Saying these words, he thrust the keys into his bosom, and throwing a fur cloak over his shoulders, his face half buried in a huge slouched hat, he issued forth with a dark lantern in his hand, offering his bosom to the pelting of the pitiless storm with a secure and joyous air. Arriving at the miser's house, that stood at no great distance, he seized two of the largest keys, and soon made good his entrance ; then advancing at once to the most secret chamber he could find, he gained admittance by double keys, and beheld a large chest, which after much difficulty he succeeded in opening. This contained others, which were equally well secured, and which he had still more difficulty in unlocking ; but what treasures opened upon his view, when his task was completed ! One contained all kinds of gold rings, chains, and jewels, with other ornaments, the most massy and valuable in their nature. In another were bags almost bursting with gold ducats, all regularly numbered and parcelled. Fazio, overpowered with joy, relinquished the bags filled with chains and jewels, saying, "As these may perhaps be recognised, I will stick to the solid gold." Having secured the last then under his arm, he departed, with the keys in his belt, towards his own house, without meeting a single person by the way ; such were the pealing thunders, and the flashes of terrific light, which redoubled the terrors of the storm. Fazio, however, reached his house, and having secured the treasure, changed his dress ; and being stout and active, he took the dead body of the miser in his arms, and bore it into his cellar. There he proceeded to make, in the floor, an excavation sufficiently large to contain his remains, into which, dressed exactly as he was, with the keys of all his treasures in his pocket, Fazio now thrust the body at least six feet below the earth, and covering it up, he fixed the whole firmly down with certain pieces of lime and tiles, in such a way that no one could perceive the place had been at all disturbed. Having thus disposed of the old miser, he proceeded very leisurely to count over the bags

of money, to which he had thus become the heir ; and such was the sudden blaze of gold that opened on his eyes, that it was with difficulty he could support the sight. Each bag contained exactly three thousand ducats, as it had been marked, which he deposited in a large chest of drawers, secured by a secret lock. His next care was to consume the trunk and bags in which he had brought the treasure, in the great fire prepared for the transmutation of his metals ; and to these he added his crucibles, his bellows, and his base metals, having no further use for them ; and having thus completed his labours, he went to rest.

By this time the storm had abated, and it was already day-break ; Fazio therefore continued to sleep, and recruit his exhausted strength, until near vespers. He then rose, and went as far as the piazza, and upon the exchange, in order to learn whether there were any reports yet afloat in regard to the disappearance of the deceased, but he heard nothing either that day or the following. On the third day, however, the miser being no longer seen about his usual affairs, people began to make remarks, more especially when they saw his house shut up, suspecting some evil must have befallen him. Several of his friends, with whom he had last been in company, then made their appearance, relating everything they knew ; but no further intelligence could in any way be elicited. Upon this the court issued an order that his dwelling should be forcibly entered, where everything was found apparently as he had left it, to the surprise of the spectators, and the whole of his property was taken possession of in the name of the government. Books, writings, jewels, and furniture, everything was found as it ought to be, in such a way as to preclude the idea of any attempt at robbery. Advertisements, however, were immediately issued, offering high rewards for the production of his person, either dead or alive. All inquiries were in vain ; and though the subject excited considerable noise and alarm, nothing whatever transpired. At the end of three months, the government, being at war with Genoa, and no relatives advancing their claims, the whole of Grimaldi's goods were

confiscated for the use of the State ; but it was considered an extraordinary circumstance that there was no appearance of ready money.

Fazio in the meanwhile continued quiet and unmolested, rejoiced to perceive how well the affair went off, and leading a happy life with his wife and family, who were now returned to him. To them he did not venture to breathe a syllable of his good fortune ; and had he fortunately persisted in this resolution, he would have avoided the utter downfall and ruin of his family. For the affair had already begun to be forgotten, gradually dying away for ever, and Fazio had given out that he was about to take a journey into France, for the purpose of disposing of several bars of silver which he had recently made ; a report ridiculed by many who were aware that he had already thrown away his time, his labour, and money, in forging the precious metals, while his friends strongly dissuaded him from leaving the place, observing that he might carry on his experiments at Pisa as well as at Paris. But our goldsmith had adopted his plan, very well knowing that he had plenty of good silver to dispose of ; though, pretending that he had not money enough for his journey, he mortgaged a little farm for one hundred florins, half of which he took with him, and left the other half for his wife. He then took his passage in a vessel to Marseilles, deaf to all the tears and entreaties of his wife, who besought him not to throw away the last of their little substance, and abandon her and her little ones to penury and to woe. "When," she said, "were we happier or better, than when you pursued your own trade, bringing us daily enough for all our wants ? Leave us not then to solitude and despair !" Fazio, tenderly soothing her, promised on his return to throw such a golden harvest into her lap, as would console her for all past sufferings ; but still in vain. "For," she continued, "if all this fine silver really exist, it will surely be as valuable here as in France ; but I fear you want to desert us for ever ; and when once these fifty ducats are spent, what will become of me, wretch that I am ? Alas ! must I go begging with these helpless little ones ? Must I lose

you, and be left to solitude and tears ?” Her husband, who loved her most affectionately, unable to behold her affliction, determined to acquaint her with his good fortune, and kissing her tenderly, he took her one day after dinner into the chamber where he had concealed his newly acquired wealth, and related to her the particulars that had occurred. He then exhibited the whole of the riches he possessed, bags of ducats, silver and gold without end ; and such was the astonishment and delight of his now happy wife, that she flung her arms in an ecstasy of pleasure round his neck, and weeping, begged forgiveness for all the complaints and reproaches she had used. Insisting upon her promise of secrecy, Fazio then acquainted her with his future plans, explaining how shortly he meant to return to her, and what a joyful and uninterrupted course of happiness would thenceforward be theirs. She no longer objected to his departure ; but taking a tender farewell, bade him to think of her, and hasten as soon as possible his return.

The next morning, accordingly, having well secured the valuable metals he was taking along with him, double locked and barred, and leaving a large portion of his treasures with his wife, he went on board, accompanied by the regrets and reproaches of all his friends, in which his wife, the better to conceal her feelings, affected to join. Indeed the whole city united in ridiculing his enterprise, and some who had known him in his better days, expressed their opinion that he ought to be taken care of, for that he was certainly inclined to run mad. Others said, that they had long been aware what would be the consequence, and he would very soon share the fate of his mad predecessors in the accursed art of alchemy, that ruined, instead of enriched its followers. In spite of all, however, Fazio set sail, and with prosperous breezes, soon arrived at Marseilles, taking care by the way to throw the whole of his chemical apparatus into the sea, reserving only the more valuable articles he had obtained from the miser’s house, with which he landed, and proceeded with the carriers as far as Lyons. In a few days after, he emptied the contents of his money-bags, depositing a large sum at one of the first banks,

for which he received letters of exchange on Pisa, some at the house of Lanfranchi, and others at that of Gualandi ; after which he sat down to write to his wife, acquainting her that he had disposed of his silver, and intended shortly to return to Pisa. This letter the lady shewed to her father, as well as to the rest of Fazio's friends and relations, some of whom expressed themselves much surprised, while others declared that he was a ruined man, the truth of which would speedily appear. Soon after, having received his letters of credit, Fazio left Lyons for Marseilles, and thence taking ship for Leghorn, he had the pleasure, in a short time, of again beholding his wife and children. Embracing them again and again, he declared that he had succeeded beyond his utmost expectations, while the tidings quickly spread among his acquaintances, that he had returned home rich with the products of his metals. He lost no time in presenting his letters of credit, on which he received nine thousand gold ducats, which were immediately sent to his house, exciting the joy and congratulations of all his relatives and friends.

Thus finding himself one of the richest men in his trade, and with the credit of having realised his fortune by his own ingenious experiments, Fazio began to think of living in a more splendid manner, and of sharing some of his happiness with friends. In the first place, therefore, he bought an estate, and then a handsome house, besides making several other rich purchases ; and investing his money in such advantageous concerns as offered, he soon assumed the manners and establishment of a prince. He added to the number of his domestics, and set up two equipages, the one for himself, and the other for his lady ; his sons were distinguished for the richness of their apparel ; and he continued to live on the happiest terms with his wife, enjoying together the luxuries and pleasures which they had at command. Pippa, to whom such a life was wholly new, became somewhat vain of the change, and was in the habit of inviting her acquaintances to witness it, among whom was an old lady, with her fair daughter, whom she invited to come and stay some time with her. Fazio, to

whom she said that they would be of use to her in a variety of ways, was induced to give his consent, happy to perceive that they assisted his wife in the cares of her establishment, and that they all lived on the best terms together.

But fortune, the constant enemy of any long-continued enjoyment and content, was preparing to change the colour of their fate, and turn this summer sweetness and glory of their days, into the chilling winter of sorrow and despair. For it was the cruel lot of Fazio to become enamoured of the young charms of the fair Maddelena, the daughter of their guest; and such was his continued and violent passion, that he at length succeeded, by the most consummate art, in leading her from the paths of innocence. Their intercourse continued for some time unknown to his poor wife, and he conferred on his unhappy victim the most lavish proofs of his regard. But as they became bolder with impunity, the unsuspecting Pippa could not, at length, fail to be aware of the truth, and displayed the indignation of her feelings on the subject in no very gentle terms. She reproached her fair guest with still more bitterness, and one day took occasion, in Fazio's absence, to drive her with the utmost fury and opprobrium from her house. Fazio, on returning home, was greatly incensed at these proceedings, and continued, with the same infatuation, to lavish the same favours upon the young Maddelena as before. On this account, scenes of the most cruel and distressing nature were continually occurring between him and his wife; the demon of jealousy had taken possession of her bosom, and family peace and love were thenceforward banished alike from their bed and board. It was in vain that Fazio now attempted to soothe or to subdue her irritated feelings. She spurned his divided affection, and she met his threats with still more violent passion, treating them with merited indignation and contempt. In order to avoid these reproaches, her husband went to one of his villas, at some distance, whither he invited his young mistress, and continued to lead the same abandoned course of life, while his wife remained plunged in the profoundest wretchedness and despair. These feelings, however,

were soon absorbed in rage and jealousy, when she found, after some months, that her husband did not return, and was lavishing still greater proofs of tenderness and favour upon her rival. Thus dwelling with ceaseless anxiety and pain upon one hateful idea, the sense of her wrongs became too great to bear, and in a short time she came to the resolution of accusing her faithless and abandoned husband to the State, by revealing the transaction which had led to his sudden elevation and prosperity. And this appearing the only resource she had left to revenge her injuries upon the authors of them, without further warning or consultation, she proceeded, alone, to consult a magistrate, who, holding an office similar to that of the Council of Eight in our own city, took down her deposition, comprehending everything she knew relative to the affairs of her husband. She, moreover, directed them to the exact spot where the remains of the miser had been buried, in the cellar of their former house, and where the officers of justice accordingly found them. Then, still retaining her in custody, the magistrate despatched the captain of the band to the residence of her husband, where they found him enjoying himself in the society of his fair Maddelena. Immediately seizing him as a prisoner of the State, they conducted him back to Pisa, overwhelmed with the most abject despair ; and when brought up for examination, he refused to utter a syllable. But his wife being ordered to appear against him, he cried out with a loud voice, at the sight of her, "This is justice, indeed !" and then, turning towards her, he added : "My too great affection for you has brought me to this" ; and, taking one of the magistrates aside, he freely revealed to him the truth of the affair, exactly as it had occurred. With one accord, however, the whole council refused to give credit to the story, asserting that there was every appearance of his having himself robbed and murdered the unfortunate Guglielmo, and threatening instantly to put him to the torture if he did not confess. This, upon his maintaining his own story, they proceeded to do and by dint of repeated trials, they at length compelled him to say what they pleased ; and afterwards proceeded to sentence

him to be broken alive upon the wheel, while the State appropriated the whole of his possessions. The remains of the miser, Grimaldi, were then ordered to be removed, and interred in sacred ground ; the beautiful Maddelena and her mother were driven with ignominy from the villa to their former abode, and the establishment of Fazio was completely broken up, his wife, with her family and domestics being compelled to take refuge wherever they could. On being released from court, where she had appeared as evidence against her own husband, the wretched Pippa returned home ; but to a home desolate and deserted by all but her children. In the agony of her grief, she wept, she raved, she tore her hair, too late perceiving with feelings of remorse, the grievous error she had committed.

The tidings spread rapidly throughout all Pisa, and the people joined in expressing their astonishment, no less at the supposed enormity and deceit of which Fazio was accused, than at the strange treachery and ingratitude of his wife. Even her own relatives and friends, who assisted her, unanimously agreed in condemning her conduct, reproaching her bitterly for the degradation and ruin which she had brought upon her family, besides the inhumanity of having thus betrayed her husband to a painful and ignominious death. Having said this, they left her weeping bitterly, and overpowered with intolerable remorse. On the ensuing day, the wretched Fazio was led forth, and drawn through the streets of Pisa on a sledge ; and after being thus exhibited to the people, he was conducted to the place of execution. There, having been first broken upon the wheel, he was executed in the presence of the people, and left on the same spot, by way of example, during the rest of the day.

The tidings of this terrific scene coming to the ears of his wife, whom he had continued cursing and reviling to his latest hour, in a fit of desperation she resolved to take vengeance upon herself. About dinner hour then, there being few people to observe her, she seized her two little boys by the hand, and led them, weeping, towards the great square, the scene of the execution, while such as met her by the way only bestowed their

maledictions on her, and allowed her to pass on. When she arrived at the foot of the platform, where the body lay, few spectators being present, she proceeded, still weeping bitterly, to ascend the steps of the platform, with the children along with her, no one around offering the least resistance. There, affecting to lament over the wretched fate of her husband, she was sternly and severely upbraided by all who stood near, who said aloud : "See how she can weep now that it is done ! It is her own work ; she would have it so ; and let her therefore despair !" The wretched wife then tearing her hair, and striking her lovely face and bosom with her clenched hands, while she pressed her burning lips to the cold features of her husband, next bade her little boys kneel down to kiss their father ; at which sight the surrounding spectators, forgetting their anger, suddenly burst into tears. But their distracted mother, drawing a knife from her bosom, with remorseless fury, hastily plunged it into the breasts of her sons, and before the people were prepared to wrest the deadly weapon from her hand, she had already turned it against herself, and fallen upon the lifeless bodies of her husband and her children. With a loud cry the people ran towards the fatal spot, where they found the dying mother and her two infants, uttering their last sighs as they lay weltering in their blood. Tidings of this tragic scene having spread rapidly throughout all Pisa, crowds of people came hastening from all sides, filled with lamentation and terror, to witness so heart-rending a spectacle ; where the yet warm and reeking bodies of the father, the mother, and the children, were piled indiscriminately upon each other. And surely nothing we have heard of the woes of Thebes, of Syracuse, or of Athens, of Troy, or of Rome, can be said to equal the domestic sorrow and calamity which Pisa thus witnessed in the lot of a single family, the whole of which was swept away in one day, the innocent victims of mistaken justice. The terror and surprise of the inhabitants of Pisa, shortly spreading through other parts of Italy, caused so great a sensation in the different cities, that people left their houses to visit the fatal spot, lamenting over the bodies of the innocent children, lying,

with smiling countenances, as if buried in a profound slumber, on their parents' funeral bier. It was impossible for them to restrain their tears at the sight, a sight sufficient to soften a heart of stone, and at which Justice herself now dropped her fatal sword. For she at length consented to grant to the prayers of Fazio's relatives that the bodies of the hapless children should be decently interred in the burial ground of Santa Catterina ; while those of the parents, who had died a desperate and unrepentant death, were to be placed without the sacred bounds, under the walls of the city. The procession was accompanied by the tears and lamentations of thousands, whose outcries against the cruelty and injustice of their fate, and whose expressions of pity for their sufferings, were loud and vehement.



GIAMBATTISTA GIRALDI ("Cinthio")
(1504-1573)



SUBLIME CONTENTION

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

AT the period when the celebrated Giovanni Trivulzi was appointed by the King of France governor of Milan, the capital city of Lombardy, a certain noble youth resided there, of the name of Giovanni Panigarola, whose bold and fiery temper involved him in frequent disputes, both with the soldiers and the citizens, to the no slight interruption of the public peace. This unruly disposition having more than once caused him to be brought before the governor, at the instance of several individuals with whom he had been engaged, he would probably have incurred the punishment due to his indiscretion, had not the venerable Trivulzi been more desirous of reforming offenders than of punishing them. Discharging him merely with a severe reprimand, out of regard to the feelings of the youth's family and friends, he trusted that he should hear of him no more. But this unfortunately was not the case ; the perverse and ungrateful youth still pursuing the same perilous career in spite of the entreaties and reproaches of his best friends. Even his union with a pleasing and accomplished young lady of Lampogiani, named Filippa, failed to convince him of the folly of his conduct : her tenderness and anxiety were lavished upon him in vain, and she lived in daily expectation of hearing of some calamitous event. Though he always treated her with the utmost kindness and affection, she would rather have been herself the victim of his quarrelsome and unhappy disposition, than have heard of his indulging it at

the expense of others, and at the imminent risk of his own life. Unable to support this incessant anxiety, the fond Filippa would frequently conjure him to abstain from thus wantonly hazarding his reputation, and her own repose, for the sake of encouraging so idle and dangerous a propensity, which cost her so many tears. Then throwing her fair arms around him, she declared that she could not long live under the torments she endured on his behalf, being in hourly dread of beholding him borne homewards a lifeless corpse. "I had rather," she exclaimed, "that you would at once pierce my bosom with your sword, than listen to the sad accounts I am daily expecting to hear of you ; so derogatory to your own honour and the name you bear, and frequently, I fear, so unjust towards the objects of your resentment. I entreat you, therefore, by our long attachment, by all my unutterable love and devotion to you, that, if you have any pity or gentleness in your nature, you will henceforth become more reasonable, and avoiding occasions of embroiling yourself with others, consent to lead the blameless and honourable life for which your abilities and your connexions are, in every way, so well calculated to qualify you. Then, and then only, shall I consider myself truly happy ; blest with your society, and enjoying the honour and respectability of your name."

Whilst listening to the kind and judicious words of her he loved, Giovanni sincerely promised reformation, and believed that he could renounce all his errors, and never more give her reason to complain. But when he was again exposed to temptations, when his boon companions repeatedly invited him, and half mad with wine, he received imaginary insults from the guests, borne away by the force of his habitual passions, he quickly gave, or as quickly received offence. About this time, the kind governor, Trivulzi, was recalled to France, and one of a more severe and implacable disposition soon after assumed his place. Nor was it long before the luckless Giovanni embroiled himself in a hot dispute with an officer of the governor's guards, until proceeding from words to blows, they drew their daggers, and his adversary in a few seconds lay

dead at Giovanni's feet. He was speedily secured by several other officers who had witnessed the deed, and being carried before the new governor, was condemned on the following day to lose his head. When these tidings reached the ears of his poor wife, so far from being prepared by all her former fears for so fatal an occurrence, she gave way to the extremity of wretchedness and despair. Inveighing against the cruelty of the governor, her own and her husband's unhappy fate, she beat her bosom, she tore her hair, and refused the consolations of her nearest relatives. "I will not be comforted," she exclaimed in a tone of agony, "you do not, you cannot know, the sufferings I endure ; and may God, in His infinite mercy, grant that none of you ever may ! Away, away then, and attempt not to assuage the burning agony I feel. It is worse than death ; and death I could suffer a thousand times rather than my husband should thus wretchedly and ignominiously end his days."

Fearing lest she might be induced by the excess of her feelings to put a period to her existence, her friends were unwilling to leave her for a moment alone. Yet finding their attempts to console her were vain, they stood silently about her couch, until the object of their solicitude having wearied herself with her lamentations, came at length to the resolution of either saving her beloved husband, or perishing in the attempt. With this view she declared to her friends around her that the only means of mitigating her sorrow, would be to procure for her a final interview with her husband, that she might at least have the sad consolation of bidding him an eternal farewell. Compassionating her forlorn condition, they all united in soliciting their husbands and brothers to endeavour to obtain this favour from the governor ; and it was permitted that during that night she might share the unhappy youth's imprisonment. Great was the emotion experienced on both sides when they met ; she threw herself into his arms, and her tender reproaches half died away on her lips. "Alas ! alas ! to what a state has your inconsiderate conduct reduced us ! Have I lived to hear that to-morrow you are condemned

to suffer death, and that I am doomed to live in the consciousness of such a sad and widowed lot ! Ah, why did you not sooner yield to the repeated entreaties and reproaches of your unhappy wife ? Did I not tell you that some fatal consequence would be sure, sooner or later, to follow ? It is come, and you have sacrificed life upon life to your wicked and infatuated career. It is enough ; and we have now to pay the forfeit of all your folly, and of all—I fear, alas ! I fear to speak it to one who should have time to repent, ere yet he die ;” and her sobs here interrupting her voice, she gave way to a fresh burst of sorrow. He who had before appeared unmoved and collected, was now melted even to tears, on witnessing the deep sorrow of his wife, knowing how fondly she was attached to him, and how ill able she was to sustain the sorrows in store for her. “My own Filippa,” he cried, gently raising her up, “I am sorry for you from the bottom of my soul ; but try to calm yourself ; why distress yourself thus for me ? You see I am not terrified at the fate which awaits me. I had rather thus die, for having conducted myself valiantly against the brutal wretch who insulted me, than live ignominiously among my fellow citizens, under the control of the soldiers who domineer over us. One, at least, has paid the forfeit of his crime. Console yourself, therefore, my Filippa, seeing that I die honourably, and not like a false traitor or a bandit, but in the noble attempt to tame the ferocity of those who too nearly resemble them. It was the slave of the cruel governor who first provoked me to do the deed ; nor could I have received the insulting language he made use of, without covering myself with eternal infamy. Then mourn not over my fate ; approve yourself worthy of my love ; and as you have ever shewn yourself a sweet and obedient wife, so even now obey me in summoning fortitude and patience to bear our lot” : and kissing her tenderly, he sought to console her by every means in his power. But his kindness seeming only to increase her grief, she declared that she should never be able to survive the affliction of losing him thus, and that she was resolved to save him or to perish in the

attempt. "Therefore," she continued, "am I come ; and as I trust that the sufferings we have experienced in this trying scene, will have made some impression on your mind, instead of further indulging these womanish complaints, we will summon fortitude to avail ourselves of the last resource which fortune has left in our power."—"How ! what is it you mean ?" inquired her astonished husband.—"That you should hasten to avoid the fate prepared for you by disguising yourself in these clothes, which I have brought hither for the purpose. Lose not a moment, for as we are nearly of the same age, and I am not much lower in stature than you, the deception will not easily be detected ; and in my dress you may make your escape. The guards are all newly appointed, and unacquainted with your person. Once safe yourself, indulge not the least anxiety about me. I am innocent, and, vindictive as he may be, the governor will not venture to shed innocent blood."—"We cannot tell that," replied Giovanni, "and the very possibility of it is sufficient to make me decline your kind and noble-hearted offer. Should he even threaten you with death, my Filippa, the governor would be certain to have me in his hands again to-morrow. So say no more of this, my love," he continued, as he kissed away her fast falling tears, "and do not believe that I would thus vilely fly, as if I were afraid to meet my fate. What will the world, what will my dearest friends and fellow citizens say, when they hear that I have absconded, at the risk of your life, and thus confirmed the worst reports of my adversaries ? No, Filippa, never ; let me here terminate my restless days rather than in any way endanger yours, which are far more precious in my eyes."

But the affliction and despair exhibited by his gentle wife on hearing these words were such as may be easier imagined than expressed ; nor did she cease uttering the most wild and incoherent lamentations, until entertaining fears for her reason, he retracted his purpose, and promised to favour her design. And as she now assisted him, between sobs and smiles, to assume his female attire, she declared that she could have

borne the thought of his death, fighting bravely in the field, or in any way, except by the hands of the public executioner. "It would then," said she, "have been my duty to support myself ; but the very idea of your dear life being thus thrown, like a wild weed, away, would have embittered all my future existence. For I recollect having frequently heard my honoured father say, and he was one of the most valiant and high-minded of our citizens, that the truly brave ought never to shun death when a noble occasion offers of serving either their country or their friends ; but that it must be truly grievous to the wretch who is compelled to meet it unsupported by any generous enterprise, or any sense of honour. And alas ! I fear you would, at last, feel yourself too much in the latter situation, and for myself, I should doubly feel it. So now, dearest love, I entreat you to use every precaution in your power to avoid discovery, and effect your escape ; breathe not a syllable to any one till you are beyond the reach of danger ; consent not to gratify the cruelty of the governor, but save yourself for more honourable enterprises, which may confound the malice of your enemies ;" and saying this she conjured him to hasten away.

Taking a hasty farewell, therefore, Giovanni bound his cloak more closely about him, and presented himself, just as the morning dawned, before the sentinels of the prison. Believing him to be the lady on her return from her husband, he was allowed to pass, without examination or suspicion. In the morning the officers entered the prison to bind the hands of the culprit, and lead him forth to execution ; when the lady, turning suddenly round upon them, inquired, with an air of authority, whether they had been commissioned to treat her with this indignity ? On discovering her sex, and after searching every part of the prison for the real offender in vain, the governor was immediately made acquainted with the truth. He ordered her to be instantly conducted into his presence, in the utmost rage at the idea of having been thus overreached by a woman ; and so far from commiserating her situation, he threatened her with the severest punish-

ment, declaring that her life should answer for her husband's, and commanding the officers upon their duty, to proceed to the place of execution. Thither then the devoted wife was carried, in spite of her tears and entreaties, and those of the surrounding people, among whom tidings of the fact having quickly gone forth, a vast concourse of each sex, and of all ages, was speedily assembled. Mingled sorrow and admiration were depicted on every countenance, and each manly breast burned with admiration of a woman of such exalted fidelity and truth, and with a wish to rescue her from so unmerited a doom. But everywhere surrounded by the tyrant's satellites, the wretched lady, invoking the name of her husband, and appealing for justice and mercy in vain, now approached the scene of her execution, and amidst the horror and indignation of the spectators, was on the point of sealing her unexampled fidelity with her life. At this moment a loud cry was heard amongst the spectators, a sword flashed above the heads of the people, and the tumult approaching nearer, Giovanni issued from the crowd, and the next moment had rescued his beloved wife from the soldiers' hands. Yet fearful lest any act of violence might involve them both in the same fate, he instantly surrendered his sword, and embracing his weeping wife, "Did I not tell you, that I would never permit you to fall a victim to your incomparable generosity and truth? Unhand her, wretches," he cried, turning towards the officers, "I am your prisoner, and those bonds are only mine."—"No! obey the governor's commands," cried the lady, "it is I who am sentenced to suffer; venture not to dispute his orders; no, I will not be released," she continued, as they were about to set her free; and a scene of mutual tenderness and devotion then took place, which drew tears from the hardest heart.

In the meantime the governor, having heard of the arrival of Giovanni, with the same unrelenting cruelty gave orders that both should be executed on the spot: the husband for the homicide he had committed, and his consort for effecting the release of the criminal from prison. The indignation of

the citizens on hearing this inhuman sentence could no longer be controlled. An instantaneous attack was made upon the soldiers and officers of the guard, who were prevented from proceeding with their cruel purpose, while numbers rushed towards the mansion of the governor, declaring that they would have justice, and insisting that the whole affair should be laid before the King. Though highly enraged at this popular interference with his sanguinary measures, the governor was compelled to bend before the storm, and with evident reluctance submitted to refer the matter to his royal master. This was no other than the celebrated Francis, whose singular magnanimity, united to his pleasing and courteous manners, still render him so justly dear to the French people.

On receiving an account of the noble and generous manner in which the lady had conducted herself, and of the worth and valour of her husband, with the proofs of mutual fidelity and affection which they had displayed, King Francis, with his usual liberality and clemency, issued his commands, that they should instantly, without any further proceedings, be set at liberty. He, moreover, expressed his high admiration of their mutual truth and constancy, and approved of the good feeling and spirit evinced by the Milanese people, declared his only regret to be, that it was not in his power to render such examples of heroic worth as immortal as they deserved to be. After a more strict investigation of the unhappy affair in which Giovanni had been last engaged, it was discovered that his adversary had really been the aggressor, and had instigated him, both by words and blows, to the terrible revenge which he had taken, in prosecuting which, at the risk of his own life, he had laid the insulting soldier dead at his feet.

Great was the triumph of the people of Milan when the tidings of the pardon of the prisoners arrived, and they paraded the streets with shouts of applause in honour of King Francis, whose clemency and magnanimity failed not to add to his popularity among all ranks. Nor were the rage and

disappointment of the bad governor inferior to the joy of the people upon this occasion, as he beheld the procession bearing the happy pair in triumph to their home. The inhabitants instantly despatched a deputation to the French monarch, expressing their grateful sense of his kindness, and their devoted attachment to his royal person.

Such, likewise, was the favourable impression made upon the character of Giovanni by this occurrence, that, influenced also by the excellent example of his wife, he, from that period, entirely abandoned the dangerous courses which he had so long pursued.



ORTENSIO LANDO

(1512-1552)



THE FAITHFUL SON

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

MANFRED, King of Navarre, was one of the most cruel and sanguinary princes of his age. Altogether unworthy of the name of king, there was nothing sacred in his eyes, nothing that seemed to restrain him in his ferocious career. He was never known to evince marks of pleasure, except where rapine and violation attended upon his steps. This unnatural disposition he more particularly indulged towards those who had most essentially served him ; until, unable longer to endure the extreme severity of his yoke, his own nobles rose up in arms, and excited the people to revolt. The signal being once given, they rushed forward in crowds towards the palace, in order to satiate their vengeance upon the spot. Incapable of making head against the wrath of his exasperated people, the sense of his past crimes suddenly smote upon the soul of the monarch, and he stood, for a moment, the image of anguish and despair : but the tidings of fate bursting louder and louder on his ear, he recollected a secret staircase which led to the back of his palace, and, snatching up the young prince, his son by Queen Altilia, a daughter of the King of Spain, he attempted to escape from the palace, already enveloped in flames. His hair, his royal mantle, and even his features, were scorched with the excessive heat ; but the child, whom he had carefully wrapped in a flannel gown, escaped unhurt. In this state he succeeded, in a quarter

where the assailants were but few, in making his way beyond the precincts of the palace, and at length, after infinite risks, he passed the frontiers of his own dominions. With slow and painful footsteps, he then proceeded, begging alms by the way, from country to country, having exchanged his royal garments for a pauper's dress, and wishing, yet afraid, to die. His exasperated subjects meeting neither with him nor his son, whose name was Vitrio, concluded that they had both perished in the flames, and immediately proceeded to elevate to the throne his brother Aldobrandino, a wise and temperate prince, who proved himself worthy of their choice.

Manfred, in the meanwhile, continued to traverse various regions, with his little boy, who sometimes walked at his side, and sometimes was borne in his father's arms, encountering unnumbered perils and deprivations, and stung with remorse at the recollection of his past enormities. Drooping at length under the weight of years and infirmities, he arrived at Sienna, where he applied for admission into the public hospital, and was charitably received. Finding himself here approaching the termination of his days, while his poor son, Vitrio, stood weeping by his side, he entreated the governor, and some other gentlemen of the city, to visit him before he expired. Several persons having complied with this request, King Manfred, turning towards the boy with tears in his eyes, addressed him as follows :—"Behold, my child, the well-merited punishment of cruelty and sin ! Behold me, a lone and banished man, perishing of want, as you have frequently witnessed, during our long and painful pilgrimage. It is my wish before I leave you, to reveal the history of our birth and name, for you are nobly born, and some time you may, perhaps, profit by a knowledge of the truth. My name is Manfred, the tyrant of Navarre, and you are the offspring of my Queen Altilia, daughter of King Severus of Spain. I saved you, at imminent risk, from the flames kindled by an indignant people, in order to envelop us in the ruins of our own palace. Believing us to have perished in the flames, my brother was elevated to the vacant throne, and I became a

wretched exile, suffering under the incessant attacks of remorse, poverty, and despair. But I have to beseech you, my son, that you will obey me in what I am about to request; that you will ever bear in mind those precepts of your ancestors, which I myself so unhappily violated or neglected; and thus avoid the horror of being surrounded by the threatening arms of an injured and exasperated people. Imprint, then, the four following maxims upon your memory. In the first place, never abandon the old path for the new; secondly, never attach yourself to a woman whom you may not lawfully call your own; thirdly, marry no woman till you have first seen her, and found her nobility of birth to be worthy of sharing your high rank; fourthly, never strike your enemy, until you have first thrice drawn your sword, and thrice sheathed it in the scabbard." Then, having taken a tender leave of his son, and, fully sensible of his late crimes, received the sacrament, and reconciled himself to our Holy Church, he turned himself upon his side and expired. During this scene, the surrounding spectators were bathed in tears; but their grief was lost in the deeper lamentation of the unhappy youth who wept over his father, as the first and the last friend he ever had in the world. "Whither shall I go? Where shall I seek a refuge now?" he cried; "my dear, dear father, thou hast left me without hope or stay!" But some gentlemen of Sienna, tearing him almost forcibly from the body, caused the deceased to be honourably interred at the public expense; nor could his son have received more ample proofs of regard, had he been the immediate successor to a throne. For the noblest Siennese families invited him to their houses, and in a short time they selected a deputation of gentlemen to accompany him into the kingdom of his grandfather, and to bear witness to the decease of Manfred, and the manner in which he had eluded the vigilance of his people. He was welcomed by King Severus with the utmost kindness, the Siennese ambassadors receiving also public testimony of his approbation of their conduct, in a variety of rich donations to grace their return.

Pleased with the young prince's conduct and disposition, the king brought him up at his own Court ; and when he had reached his sixteenth year, he bestowed upon him the hand of one of the most beautiful princesses of Portugal, celebrating his espousals with the bright Cillenia in the most pompous and magnificent manner. Not very long after this, Vitrio was seized with a violent fever, and in order to facilitate his recovery, he made a pious vow to visit as a pilgrim the holy cities of Rome and Jerusalem. On his convalescence, therefore, he entreated the king to permit him to fulfil his vow, which he doubted not had restored him so far to health. This, with some difficulty, being at length granted by the king, who tenderly loved him, the invalid set out, loaded with rich presents, and attended by a noble train. Having visited Rome, and made the due offerings at the holy shrine, he departed for Ancona, where he hired a noble galley to convey him to the port of Baruti, situated not very far from Jerusalem. He was borne by prosperous breezes until he arrived near the isle of Cyprus, when a sudden tempest arising, the vessel was driven off the coast of Syria, and being dashed to pieces on the rocks, about twenty of the passengers were saved and captured by the neighbouring inhabitants. But Vitrio, with several of his companions, had first escaped to shore, and continued his flight during the whole of that day along the coast, without any nutriment, until they were overpowered by fatigue. The following morning, meeting with some wild berries, they recruited their exhausted strength, and were fortunate enough, after long toil, to reach a spring of water near the shore ; but so dark and turbid as to be extremely nauseous to the taste. Vitrio then threw himself, overwhelmed with sorrow and weariness, upon the sands, desirous of obtaining some repose. On seeing this, two of his attendants began to lament their unhappy fate, and, reproaching him with want of feeling in having paid no attention to them, they resolved to consult their own safety, and to abandon him as he lay. Awakening soon after, he arose and called them by their names, and, when those who remained faithful to

him came forward, he besought them not to desert him ; for he had dreamed, that, while he slept, his companions had departed. Under the impression that they had all conspired to betray him, he now besought them most tenderly as friends and brothers, that they would neither be ungenerous enough to injure him, nor to abandon him to his fate. Thus addressing them, with tears in his eyes, he resumed his way ; and about the middle of the day it so happened, that he again fell in with the two cavaliers who had agreed to leave him. Weary with travelling along the shore, where nothing was found to satisfy the cravings of hunger and thirst, Vitrio determined to strike into the interior of the country. They soon afterwards arrived at a spot where two pathways met ; one of which appeared new and spacious, the other untravelled and overgrown with briars and thorns. Vitrio, here recollecting the advice given him by his father, never to abandon the old path to walk in the new, came to the resolution of persevering in the thorny way. Upon observing this, the two cavaliers who had before abandoned him, began to reproach him with his folly in persevering in a road which would certainly lead his companions into destruction. But Vitrio, deigning not to reply, pursued the path which he had chosen, followed by Lambrone and Gelso only, two of his attendants, who still remained faithful to him. The sun had scarcely gone down before the latter travellers reached a large town called Rama, at a short distance from Zaffo, a place to which a great number of Christians used to resort. Gelso, who understood the language of the country, there procured provisions for their support, and the following day they arrived at Zaffo ; while the two cavaliers, who had traversed the great road, attended by the rest of the crew, were all surprised and cut off by banditti, with the exception of a single man, who brought tidings of their fate to Zaffo. In a few days they again resumed their journey, and had the good fortune to reach Jerusalem, where, after religiously observing their vows, they bent their way towards the sea-shore, and, passing into Cyprus, the prince there fell sick, and was confined to his couch for the

space of a year. When he recovered, his two faithful friends, Gelso and Lambrone, likewise fell sick, and died soon after. Vitrio shed many tears over their graves, and it was long before he again recovered sufficient fortitude to resume his way, whithersoever his destiny might lead. But tears availed him nothing, and, having exhausted his other resources, he betook himself to a few jewels, which he disposed of to the best advantage, and proceeded slowly towards Nicozia. He there remained some time in the Court of King Troilus, who, pleased with his gentle manners, no less than with the story of his adventures, granted him a refuge from the assaults of fortune. But even here, alas ! she did not long cease to persecute him ; for a daughter of Theodoro, lord of Arzuffo, becoming deeply enamoured of him, soon gave him to understand, by secret messages, that she had bestowed upon him her whole heart, and loved him more than herself. Again recollecting his father's instructions, not to attach himself to any woman but his lawful wife, Vitrio received her overtures with the utmost coldness, and at length began to avoid her presence, in order to shew his decided aversion to her suit. The consequences of this proceeding were soon felt by Vitrio, for the lady, indignant at his rejection of her advances, changed her love into the fiercest anger and disdain. In order to ensure a safe revenge, she gave orders to her nurse, to deposit a case of jewellery under the young prince's couch ; and the wicked old woman having obeyed her, the prince was immediately accused by the offended lady of having committed the theft. After enduring solitary confinement for the space of two years, he was sentenced to terminate his days upon the gallows. Now it was an ancient custom of the island, that every criminal, condemned to death, had the power of redeeming himself by the payment of two thousand byzants. But this unhappy youth had already expended all his resources in feeing the judges, the advocates, and the courtiers, in order to obtain the exercise of their influence in a final appeal to the monarch. In fact he was now completely destitute, and there was nothing left for him, but to summon

fortitude to die. His eyes were already bound, and he was fast approaching the scene of execution, when a beautiful maiden, who had lately succeeded to a large inheritance, observed him passing along, buried in the profoundest affliction. Taking compassion on his fate, and impelled by a tenderer feeling, she instantly offered the amount of the fine, and claimed, at the same time, the young man's deliverance, if he would consent to accept her as his spouse. It is impossible now to describe the mental struggles of the unfortunate youth, and we may justly estimate the magnanimity of his soul, in hesitating as to a proposal of marriage, although the preservation of his life depended upon his acceptance of it. Even now he debated within himself whether to perish, or to violate the commands of his holy religion, by taking two wives. In this emergency he recollected the injunction of his father not to marry until he had seen the lady, and ascertained her nobility of birth ; and he therefore requested to see the maiden, and to be informed as to her extraction. The bandage was removed from his eyes, and the officer, pointing out the lady, observed, "Behold the fair daughter of the merchant Palliodoro." On hearing these words, Vitrio, turning to the officers of justice, bade them lead on, for that he was content to suffer. "The crown of Navarre," he exclaimed, "must never sit upon the head of a merchant's daughter, however exalted a soul she may possess. Heaven, I trust, will grant her a better husband than I should ever make her ; and as for me, if it be well that I should escape, God will yet provide the means." Hearing these expressions, and beholding the firm and noble deportment of the prisoner, the chief officer despatched a messenger to the king, saying, that the youthful stranger had refused the price of his redemption, and the hand of the rich daughter of Palliodoro. The king then ordered Vitrio to be brought before him, and obtained from him a full confession of his previous history, of his long wanderings and sufferings, after having fled with his father, and begged their bread in foreign lands : "Compassionate, then," continued Vitrio, "most noble prince, my strange and un-

happy fortunes. Permit me not to suffer, until my accusers have been again examined : you will find that I am innocent, and that I do not deserve to die. Your majesty will not, therefore, deny me that justice which I have not yet received." The two women being then brought into the presence of the king, and threatened with torture if they did not forthwith reveal the whole truth, immediately confessed the falsehood of the charge, and were condemned to perpetual imprisonment.

The monarch then commanded a noble vessel to be fitted out, in order to convey the stranger to the shores of Spain. Returning his grateful thanks, Vitrio departed, and soon after landed in the territories of King Severus, and proceeded towards his Court, reflecting on the results of his obedience to his dear father's precepts. It was just on the point of night-fall, as he reached the outskirts of the royal palace, where, giving his name to the astonished officers, who had long numbered him with the dead, he proceeded up the staircase, and along the spacious galleries, alone. The first object which he beheld, on approaching the scene of his former pleasures and power, was a lady caressing an infant in her arms ; the same lady, whom he had left so young, his own cherished and honoured bride. His first impulse was a feeling of jealousy, and, believing that she was caressing an adulterous offspring, he was on the point of unsheathing his sword, and sacrificing them both to his revenge. But the memory of his father once more rushed into his mind : "Never," he exclaimed within himself, "strike your foe, until you have thrice drawn your sword from its scabbard :" and he stood and gazed fearfully some moments at the lady and the child. The latter, startled at the glittering blade, ran screaming towards its mother, who sat with her face turned partly aside from her husband's view, crying out that a man was coming to kill him. "Sleep, sleep, little foolish one," replied his mother ; "no man, since my dear husband left me, has ever passed this sad chamber door." Catching the sound of these words, Vitrio, breathing a prayer of gratitude to his father's

spirit, quickly sheathed his sword, and hearing his child repeating the name of mother, he rushed forward, and the next moment found them both clasped within his arms. His voice and features were still so familiar to the fancy of the princess, that she knew him in a moment ; and a sudden flood of joyous tears at once expressed and relieved the deep emotions of her breast. The tidings quickly spreading abroad, the prince was immediately introduced into the presence of the king, who received him as if he had recovered his own son. A general festival was in consequence proclaimed throughout the kingdom, and jousts and tournaments were celebrated. The King of Portugal, his father-in-law, demonstrated no less satisfaction at his return, which he evinced by the pomp and magnificence of his entertainments. In after years, Prince Vitrio succeeded to the throne of his grandfather, to which, before his decease, he added the sceptres of his uncle, and of his wife's father, thus reigning over three several countries. He was blessed with a numerous progeny, and as he had always approved himself a fond and obedient son, he had the delight of embracing only wise and affectionate children.

ANTON FRANCESCO DONI
(1513-1574)



THE HUNCHBACK

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

THE dowager queen of Salimspruch had a daughter named Galierina, about five years of age. As she was walking in the garden, this child happened to find a young lizard, with which she ran to her mother in great glee, throwing it, as young girls are apt to do, upon her mother's lap, which so terrified the queen, that she declared in her anger, she would never consent to bestow her daughter's hand in marriage, until the reptile had grown to the size of the girl herself. She even swore by her crown that she would execute this threat ; a vow which greatly displeased the governess of the fair child, who, being affectionately attached to her, vowed on her part to take the best care of the lizard she could. And such was the efficacy of this vow that, with the blessing of heaven and fine feeding, the young lizard began to grow and grow, nor ever stopped, until it became nearly as large as a crocodile. Everyone was astonished on beholding it, and greatly praised the care and prudence of Donna Spira, who had thus rescued her fair pupil from the fate of dying an old maid. The latter having attained to maturity, it was deemed proper to try the effect of chance in the disposal of her hand, with which view the queen resolved to kill the lizard, and extract its lungs, in order to exercise the sagacity of her suitors : "Now," said she, "we will proclaim a grand feast and tournament, and invite all the cavaliers in the world, to try their fortune in the joust, and whoever afterwards guesses

the name of the reptile which possessed these lungs, let him have my daughter, and half this kingdom, as a reward for his pains."

Far and wide, throughout all cities and nations, spread these happy tidings of a royal tournament, and the marriage of queen Pilessa's beauteous daughter. What magnificent trains of lords and dukes, counts and marquesses, of all ages and nations, were seen gathering towards the happy spot ! Long they fought, and fell, and conquered : after which, at the trumpet's sound, were exhibited to view, in the midst of all, the lizard's lungs, and proclamation was made with a loud voice, that whatsoever prince or lord should declare to what animal these reliques had belonged, should be entitled to the princess, and half the kingdom as her dower. Upon this, the name of every kind of creature in the world, but the right one, was quickly pronounced, until it came to the turn of the Duke of Milesi, who, enjoying the good graces of Donna Spira, had fixed his eye boldly upon her beautiful charge. The nurse at length hit upon the following ingenious method, as she thought, of acquainting him with the real nature of the poor lizard's lungs. She cast her eye upon one of the ugliest hunchbacks that was ever seen, as the least suspicious person she could employ ; and beckoning him, she said, "If you will promise to be secret, I will make you one of the richest hunchbacks that was ever known ; you have only to be wise, and keep silence." On receiving his promise, she gave him a purse of ducats, saying, "Hasten to the Duke of Milesi, and whisper him, on the part of the young lady, that the lungs belonged to a lizard." Upon which, repeating his oath of secrecy, the ugly hunchback left the nurse ; and standing for some time apart, he considered whether it would be most prudent to inform the duke, or avail himself of the information on his own account. At length he determined that it would be better to possess half the kingdom for himself than the favour of the reigning prince ; and so taking fortune by the forelock, he ventured upon the following bold manœuvre. Making his way before the queen, he thus addressed

her : "Knowing that your royal blood was ever faithful to its engagements, and relying upon the honour of your crown, I appear here to say to what creature these precious reliques belonged, and claim in return your daughter, and half the kingdom." "Certainly, it is so," replied the queen ; while all the barons and courtiers burst into a loud laugh, as he pronounced them to be the lungs of a lizard. "Nay, let those laugh who win," cried the hunchback ; "for I myself once brought up a lizard that grew as large as my back, until putting it one night to bed without its nightcap on, it caught such a bad cold that, before I had time to have it properly cured, it absolutely died of suffocation." The whole company upon this laughed still louder, saying, "Good, very good ; was ever anything like it ?" But little Hunchback continued, "It is, however, as I say ; because on dissecting my lizard, I found its lungs were made exactly the same as these." The queen replied, "Since fortune has so far favoured you, I am bound to observe my engagement ; and now truly the hand of my daughter, with half of the kingdom, is your own."

Mr. Hunchback was accordingly arrayed like a courtier, and exalted above all the barons of the land : there was no denying that he was the fair princess's future spouse. Sad, however, was the envy and heart-burning of the suitors, to behold such a monster so well versed in the anatomy of lizards, and entitled to the fair princess's hand. Truly they would have laid foul hands upon him, and eaten him up alive, could they have found an opportunity, but he kept close to the princess's side. But what was the indignation of her nurse when, expecting to behold the handsome duke, she saw this little wretch elevated in his place ! Casting upon him the eye of a basilisk, though she ventured not to break out into open abuse, she muttered to herself, "Oh, villain of a hunchback ! by the holy cross of our Lord, I will make thee pay dearly for this !" Then, full of the most desperate thoughts, she proceeded to consult with her unhappy charge, who also viewed him with evident reluctance, and listened but too willingly to every possible means of despatching him,

in preference to receiving him as her lord. But the glorious tidings having already gone abroad, there came a number of fresh hunchbacks, flocking to the royal festival of their companion, who performed a variety of admirable tricks, to the astonishment of all the Court. This added not a little to the influence of the new prince, who seemed greatly pleased at the praises which they on all sides elicited. But to cut short the scene, which he thought began to trench a little upon his dignity, when the presumptuous hunchbacks approached him familiarly, to receive their reward, their royal brother gave each of them a kick upon their bumps, and ordered them to be taken down into the kitchen.

Now this unkind usage of his old friends was extremely grating to the gentle feelings of his princess ; she therefore gave orders that these very facetious hunchbacks should be invited for another day, in order to receive the due recompense of their humorous tricks. In the meantime, under various pretexts, she contrived to keep her royal consort at a distance, until the day, appointed for the return of the hunchbacks, arrived. They were directly introduced into the princess's chamber, where she opened upon their astonished eyes a variety of trunks filled with costly apparel ; but, just as she was in the act of presenting some to them, the footsteps of her crooked spouse were heard actually ascending the staircase. There was no alternative but to thrust the little crooked fellows into the trunks, which was no sooner done than the royal Hunchback stepped into the chamber. All was still as death ; for had they made the least noise, they would infallibly have been hanged to satisfy the foolish jealousy of his highness. He remained with the princess some time, which placed the lives of his trembling subjects in the utmost jeopardy, as they were already beginning to gasp for breath. Still he stayed, and stayed ; and when at length, on his taking his leave, the princess hastened to open the trunks, what was her surprise and sorrow on finding that all her amusing guests were quite dead ! After breathing harder and harder, they had gone into convulsions, and their feeble

kicks had scarcely reached the ears of the royal spouses. Closing the trunks, however, she resolved to make the best of a bad business ; and consulting with her nurse, they forthwith confided the whole affair to a faithful courtier, presenting him at the same time with a sum of money. With this he directly proceeded to purchase three large bags, exactly alike ; and calling a stout porter, he gave them to him, saying, "Follow me ;" and marched back, as fast as he could, straight into the palace. They first took one of the little deceased, and squeezing him till he came within the dimensions of the bag, the princess, addressing the porter, said, "Do you mark me ? Carry this sack away, and throw it, just as it is, into the river. Here are ten ducats ; but take heed how you open it, and when you come back you shall have twenty more." So the porter threw the burden on his shoulder, saying, "I wish I had more such jobs as these ;" and after pitching it into the river, he hastened back as fast as he could. In the chamber he found the same identical burden lying there, which he thought he had just disposed of, the second humpback having assumed the place of the first. Testifying no little surprise, the lady said to him, "Do not be alarmed ; but truly he is a sly villain, as you see, and delights to plague people. He will be sure to come back again, if you do not throw him far enough, and sink him in the river ; this time you must take better care." Perfectly satisfied with the ducats, the man took up his burden, and again launched it into the deepest part of the river he could find, and staying to watch it fairly sink, he exclaimed in a joyful tone, "I think you are fairly gone at last ;" for the night was now setting in, and he did not much relish another journey along the banks of the river. Taking a light, however, he returned into the chamber, and beheld a third sack ready prepared for him ; and seizing it in no little anger, he bore it away. But as soon as he had made his way through the crowd, he determined, at all hazards, to know with what kind of a devil he had to deal ; and opening the bag, he found an ugly little hunchback in it. "Oh, thou cursed beast !" he cried, "I will try to end thee now ;" and

taking out a huge knife, he severed the head from the body. Then thrusting it into the sack, filled with stones and iron, he once more committed him to the river, and made his way back to the palace. Now it so chanced, that just at the entrance he met with the royal hunchback himself, returning doubtless from some mischievous expedition, and making the best of his way to pay another visit to his beloved princess. The porter had no sooner set his eyes upon him than he exclaimed in the utmost indignation, "Ah, villain Hunchback, are you here before me again?" and seizing him with all the glorious strength of a porter by the beard, he bound him in a moment quite fast, and thrusting him into the sack, he said, "Three times you have made me return, and yet you are at it again ; but we shall see who has the best of it." In this way he carried the royal Hunchback along, who in vain asserted his title to majesty, and that he was just going on a visit to his queen, and endeavoured to bribe his treacherous subject at any price. It was all in vain : he was thrown headlong into the river, while the porter proceeded back, not without some apprehension that he should have another journey. On mounting the staircase, however, and proceeding into the chamber, he had the satisfaction of beholding his labours completed ; for no more hunchbacks were to be seen. "Yes, you have done," said the princess ; "I do not think he will come back any more now :—here, take all these ducats, and fare you well." The porter replied, "But he has returned a good many times though ; for I met him just now coming in at the gate ; so I bound him fast, and put him into the sack in spite of him, and then threw him again into the river. To be sure, he offered me a deal of money to let him go ; and threatened and swore, and said he was the king ; but it was all of no use : he was obliged to be drowned. So I think I have earned my wages well, by four such journeys as these."

Upon hearing these tidings, the princess and her maids of honour were quite overjoyed ; and lavishing the most liberal favours upon the porter for his lucky blunder, they bribed him to keep the matter secret. Thus by a single blunder,

the porter became a rich man ; the lady was freed from an ugly brute of a husband ; and the Duke of Milesi made happy, in possessing the charms of the beautiful princess. Let the fate of the royal Hunchback be a lesson, then, for those, who are inclined, by fraudulent means, to advance themselves at the expense of others.



GIOVANNI SAGREDO

(1616-1682)



A SHREWD SUPPORTER

(Translated by —)

THREE men, owners of a ship, after long voyages which had brought them considerable profits, decided not to risk their wealth against the whims of the winds any longer, but to pass in leisure and comfort the rest of their busy days. They therefore entered the harbour of Pisa, and, selling their ship, they realised about twelve thousand crowns, which they entrusted to a banker, on the condition that he should never pay out either much or little of that money to any one of them unless they were all three together.

Now it happened that one of those men was tired of keeping his money under that restrictive clause, and wished moreover to rob his associates of their shares. He was the manager of their common household, and, when some expense was necessary, or a sum was required, it was he who drew the money with the authorisation of the other two. One day, then, he went to the banker, and, in order to win his confidence, told him that he had found a very good opportunity of investing all the money in a certain place in the country, with the agreement of his associates. And to them, knowing that they had been invited by a gentleman of Pisa to a hunting party, he said :—"My friends, if you like to amuse yourselves, do, but without prejudice to our common interest. We must pay the rent of this house, and the butcher's

bill. To-morrow, therefore, on leaving the town on horseback to go a-hunting, please pass by the banker's, and tell him to pay out to me the amount I will require for our common management."

His companions, who had no suspicions, passing the house of the banker on the following day told him to pay out to their associate the sum he required. On hearing this, and far from suspecting tricks, the banker gave the man all the money, that he might invest it as he had said. But, as soon as the cunning man got the money, he hired a ship which was in the harbour ready to sail, and fled away.

When his two companions came back to town, and heard of the theft, they brought the banker into court;—from his registers, which he was compelled to produce, it appeared, with scarcely any doubt, that he had agreed to pay out no money unless his three creditors were present together. The two cheated men, exaggerating, maintained that the runaway had committed the theft in collusion with the banker, so all the people who attended the case considered that the banker should pay the whole sum according to the agreement, and that the two owners should receive a favourable verdict.

Whilst this case was being discussed at the court, the priest Arlotto happened to be in town, and had his lodgings, as usual, at the banker's house. When he had heard all about this business, he offered to conduct his friend's defence, and to obtain a sentence favourable to him. On the following morning therefore he presented himself before the judge, and said :—"Sir, you cannot sentence this banker to disburse any money until it is proven that he has paid out the sum against his duty, and the agreement with his creditors. Give me that book. Does it not say that the banker is not allowed to make any disbursement except in the presence of all the three partners? Come here all three, then, and the banker will fulfill his duty."

When the two replied that the third had run away, "If he has run away," said the Piovano, "run after him and catch him, for the banker is not allowed to pay except according to

the agreement expressly stated in this book : for otherwise he would have to pay twice, which cannot honestly be required of him."

And with this prudent and witty reply he freed his friend from that vexation, and the judge acquitted him to the general satisfaction.



LORENZO MAGALOTTI

(1637-1712)



ROMANTIC LOVER

(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

U P O N the summit of Rua, one of the loftiest of the Euganean hills, situated amidst the solemn scenes of Nature, and secluded beneath a canopy of embowering trees, stood the solitary abode of the Penitent Eremites. Its commanding site, overlooking verdant hills and pleasant villas, with noble cities rising in the distance, fully compensated by its variety for the desert loneliness of the spot, the quiet approach to which lay through avenues of lofty pine, inspiring a deep and sacred calm, mingled with an awe well adapted to the scene.

No women are permitted to approach the place, except on an appointed day in the early part of autumn, when they are shewn no farther than the temple ; not into the more secluded sanctuaries of the hermits' abode. A solemn festival then ushers in the period ; the most beautiful women splendidly attired, and mounted upon spirited palfreys, vie with each other in dress and loveliness, and escorted by the flower of the nobility, add grace and liveliness to the scene. Never was it more magnificently celebrated than on a certain occasion, when the lady of one of the rectors of Padua, who had recently lost her eldest son, returning from France, in the flower of his age and hopes, attended the ceremony with a noble train of ladies and cavaliers, with whom she ascended the summit of the mount. The splendour of the feast, abounding with all the

rarities more suitable to the genius that supplied them, than to the nature of the establishment, was calculated to surprise, and even to dazzle the eye.

The warmth of the day becoming more and more insupportable, the lady of the feast, accompanied by her train, retired into the shady recess formed by some beautiful beeches, surrounding a little eminence, which commanded a lovely and extensive prospect. There the sweet and solitary scene, so favourable to the indulgence of tender and melancholy thoughts, led her to praise a mode of life, so wholly divested of all wordly cares, and preferable in her estimation to the aspiring dignity and love of glory, so much affected by vulgar minds, and she proceeded to contrast the vanity of such earthly considerations, with the milder pleasures and innocent repose of life, such as were there enjoyed. She had hardly concluded, before one of the cavaliers present, happened to mention that such a choice had really been made and adhered to, by a noble youth of great worldly expectations. To him the solitude and deprivation of a hermitage offered more true delight, than the noblest alliances and most festive Courts in the world. Expressing her high admiration of so disinterested and magnanimous a resolution, and curious to hear the variety and changes of fortune that had led to it, the lady entreated the superior of the convent to introduce her to him. In a short time he made his appearance ; the nobility of his aspect was clearly apparent through his homely habit, while the traces of youthful fire and beauty still threw a charm over his fine, but pallid features.

The modesty and humility of his demeanour were in unison with the character he had adopted, though not destitute of the courtesy due to a noble lady and her festive train, on an occasion like the present. The lady, possessing singularly noble and pleasing qualities, paying him the respect due to his rank, and commending his resolution as arising out of the most excellent motives, besought him to favour them with an account of his adventures. The young hermit attributed the merit wholly to the divine power, and expressed great repug-

nance to repeat the history of his transgressions, 'on which his superior sought to remove his scruples, by observing, that whatever had been the errors of his past life, he had fully repaired them by his exemplary sorrow and repentance ; and as it would, perhaps, be a great punishment to him, it would tend to his edification to relate his past life, and add to the efficacy of his sufferings. The young man bowed his head to the superior in token of compliance, and with a composed countenance, and a sort of modest assurance thus began :—
“It is a due punishment upon my past levities ; the pain of revealing them before this honourable and excellent company, I meet with patience and resignation. Obedience, however, is my duty, and all diffidence must give way, so that I have to entreat of your honourable company, most illustrious lady, to excuse me for my apparent boldness in intruding my private affairs upon your attention.

“My name was Sigismondo Conte d'Arco, the only branch belonging to that house for a long series of years, that possessed many extensive seigniories on the confines of Italy and Germany. My father died while I was yet a child ; and, my mother, on her marrying a second time, caused me to be educated at the Court of the Archduchess Dowager of Innspruck, my native sovereign, as one of the pages of honour. My tender age and misfortunes awakened so much compassion in the princess, that she seemed to regard me rather as a mother than a mistress, treating me in every particular like her child. She made me a playfellow of the Princess Claudia, an only daughter, about the same age as myself, not exceeding seven : we lived on the most familiar terms, and formed an attachment that became more rooted with our increasing years. It would be idle to attempt to disguise from your penetration, madam, that such youthful tenderness and familiarity were likely soon to ripen into confidence—into love. This passion seemed daily to acquire fresh force, inasmuch as it did not appear disagreeable to the princess, who was quite sensible of its existence. To say the truth, as it will fully appear in the sequel, if you will not think me guilty of too great temerity in

raising my eyes to my young queen, I began to imagine, and not without reason, that she deigned to bend hers also upon me. We had each just completed our fifteenth year ; my sweet companion was gifted with all the brightest qualities and accomplishments, both of mind and person ; the fame of her virtues and her beauty, not only spreading throughout Germany, but the rest of Europe. Indeed her portraits have since become familiar in every land, and few are there of those present who would require a more particular description of her charms at my hands. But I have to delineate a few qualities that no pencil can reach ; those features of the living mind, bright and beautiful, which at the same moment were enabled to seize their subject, to distinguish, and to deliberate, in a manner surprising to the most skilful and accomplished intellects.

“Her demeanour was a mixture of sweet grace and gravity, and this soft majesty she always displayed with so little effort, as to make it appear perfectly natural. Her pleasures were all innocent and delicate ; music forming the chief, in which she was most passionately attached to harmonies of a plaintive and pathetic cast. I have often surprised her singing such songs in some sweet retired scene, and shedding tears over feigned woes, borne away by her natural tenderness, and by an irresistible attachment to subjects of this description.

“In truth, it might be said, that her own prophetic genius inspired her with some of those tender lines connected with her own future fortunes, which she sang like the dying bird, that is said to usher in her own doom. Deeper passion, along with a sense of duty, now more and more usurped my breast ; my struggles became great ; I blamed my own presumption ; I tried to recover my self-command, but all in vain. My eyes had too long dwelt upon and become rivetted to her charms, and one look of hers overpowered my firmest resolutions, inso-much that I found I must either give way to my feelings and madly throw myself at her feet, or seek to avoid her presence. I no longer frequented her company at those seasons when I was able to dispense with my duties at Court ; while the better

to give an air of probability to my absence, I devoted myself with double assiduity to my studies, and to the amusements common to my age. Fencing, riding, and every kind of military exercise, seemed to absorb my whole time, but my thoughts were, in reality, far away. My evenings were spent in music, dancing, and other favourite diversions of the Court, while my more serious hours were engaged in the abstruser sciences.

"In this manner weeks passed away without a single interview with my beloved princess ; our mutual pursuits of dancing, singing, riding, and reading together, were wholly abandoned. Meeting me one day, by chance, returning from the riding-school, heated and breathless with exercise, she began to rally me upon my sudden and surprising application to more martial pursuits, while, in the same tone, I respectfully assured her, that it arose wholly out of a desire to render myself more worthy of her highness's service ; and bowing to her with the same ceremony practised by the other courtiers, I left her without waiting for any reply.

"Whilst I was persevering with the utmost pain in this assumed character, it was resolved by the Court to adjourn, in order to partake of the pleasures of the country. The place was delightfully situated at a short distance from the city ; and the usual duties and occupations of the Court giving way to mere amusement, all motive for my prescribed absence and alienation from the young princess ceased. Besides, however much I studied to avoid her, it was not always possible ; she surprised me one morning early, in a shady walk leading from the garden to the wood ; we met—our eyes met, and with a profound obeisance, I sought to pass on. Commanding me, however, to follow her, she pursued the path leading to the wood, with a composed air and a serene aspect. At length addressing me, she observed, 'Your wisdom and discretion, Count, are above all praise, and merit as much kindness and generosity on my side. It is in vain that you strive to conceal the occasion of your late estrangement, and it would be equally vain for me to affect ignorance of it. Nevertheless, I

do not wish to give you pain ; you shall find your advantage in it ; and that you may feel assured of this, even listen and receive the tribute due to your merit.' Blushing deeply as she uttered these words, she saw likewise that I observed it, and continued as follows : 'My confusion, Sigismond, proceeds from my inexperience in such affairs ; not from any sense of saying or doing aught unworthy my birth and quality. I know not whether it be permitted a princess to countenance a vassal's love, but I do know, that if ever there was one to be pitied in the world, I am that one. Our friendship seemed to have been born with us : I felt as a child a sort of instinctive attachment to you ; our young and playful affection grew with us, and it has continued, as is but too apparent, to be cherished on both sides, until it has become a part of ourselves. I am familiar with all your feelings, and understand them better than you understand mine ; and in common gratitude, it becomes my duty to confess, that I feel the same partiality towards you, that I am convinced you bear to me. Why then dissimulate with you, or leave you to extort it from me by degrees, when such an admission is mere justice to your virtues, that you may in future feel that noble confidence in them which is calculated to make you happy ?

" 'Your features are sufficient evidence of your joy. I see it, alas ! while I confess with burning blushes, how much I love you ; though, as we are equal in our passion, I have no cause for shame in the avowal. Were the sceptre I am fated to inherit in my own power, in your hands only should it be deposited ; but I am certain that you place a higher value upon my heart than upon my possessions. Fortune may dispose of the latter ; of my heart, never—it is yours—dispose of it as you will. I am sure you will never abuse your power over it ; at all events it is yours !' Ere the lovely princess had half concluded these words, I was at her feet, lost in a delirium of confusion and joy. Not a word could I utter ; I kissed the hem of her robes ; I felt her tears upon my hands, as she gently sought to raise me from the ground. I seized her offered hand, and covered it with my kisses : 'Dearest lady ; most honoured and

cherished mistress,' I cried, 'is it possible I can believe my senses? Were this the first proof of your regard, well might I imagine you meant to scoff me for the rash feelings I have indulged; but I have experienced ever since a child, that your compassion, your generosity, have no bounds. May Heaven's richest blessings attend you! you have snatched me from an abyss of terror and despair, at the bare idea of the passion I indulged; and I am now at the summit of all human felicity. Yet would I willingly have aspired higher than the honour of serving you, even at the risk of all I held dear, of life itself; and therefore it was, that I attempted to shun you. A sceptre, a thousand sceptres, in competition with your love, would have no charms for me; let kings seize your realms; I am satisfied in possessing the nobility and royalty of such a soul as yours. Ah! would that, as our love, our birth were equal; for I esteem not the wealth or dignity of worlds, equal to the least testimony of your favour. I should be the meanest and vilest of wretches, to regard aught beyond the beauties of soul and form, that have subdued me so long.'

"I was proceeding, in the tumult of my feelings, to express my gratitude and delight, when a group of ladies and cavaliers appeared in sight, and I followed the princess as she turned to meet the party, with a free and even lively and playful air. During the few days that the Court sojourned in the country, wholly devoted to the feast, the chase, and similar rural diversions, it became my delightful task to resume my former station, being almost in constant attendance upon the princess. No longer on the list of pages, I had entered upon the more honourable rank of cavalier, while my early intimacy and education with the princess, and the respect which she uniformly testified for me in public, acquired for me no little distinction at Court. And as the chief object of her serene highness the archduchess, who held paramount sway, was to amuse the mind of the princess, naturally inclined to melancholy, she ordained a solemn festival, to grace the close of their residence, after the pleasures of a magnificent chase. The young princesses, along with the ladies of the Court,

appeared arrayed in the character of Amazons, with high waving plumes on their heads, and upon richly caparisoned palfreys. The Princess Claudia Felice, was seen mounted upon a swift courser, of a jet black, and adorned with a tuft of feathers, while its fair rider shone bright to the eye in a loosely folded dress, elegantly suited to the occasion. When she entered into the wood, she drew nearer to me, as I rode along at her side, and took occasion, without observation, to inform me of her great desire to obtain some signal triumph over the ferocious prey. I then approached still closer to her, separating from the rest of the party, and penetrating still deeper into the recesses of the wood, which the wild beasts were supposed to haunt in greater numbers. There, without deigning to pursue either stags or hares, or any animals of a less ferocious cast, the hunters prepared to attack a huge wild boar, which came rushing towards us, pursued by some of the dogs. Desirous of yielding to the princess the honour of despatching him, I stepped aside to leave him open to her attack, when she had the good fortune to wound him mortally with her hunting spear in the head. In a transport of rage, the beast still sprung forward in the same direction, urged on all sides by the dogs, and notwithstanding two pistol-shots, rushing upon her horse that stood in its way, the princess, by the disorder into which she was thrown, ran the greatest risk of her life. Some of the hunters now eagerly hastened to her assistance, but they were on foot, and before they could arrive, I had sprung from my horse between the princess and the enraged animal, and assaulted it furiously with my sword. Having passed the weapon through its body, I laid it dead at her feet, while, with the utmost presence of mind, not half so much terrified at her own danger as I had been, she said : 'I find it is a great advantage to place myself under your protection ; you seem to know how to defend what belongs to you'—'And what coward would not, when he had to combat in so sweet and glorious a cause?' But the hunters coming up, prevented farther conversation ; they raised the enormous animal with difficulty, in order to bear it in triumph before the princess, to

meet the rest of the party. Already informed of the accident, the archduchess was hastening, full of alarm, in the same direction. Shocked at beholding its immense size, on its first appearance, her terror was the next moment changed into an exclamation of triumph, when she beheld the beloved princess unhurt accompanied by me ; she received us with the warmest gratulations, bestowing upon me praises and rewards too flattering to recount. The chase then continued with double vigour and animation ; the quarry was more than equal to our hopes ; and, with the evening festivities, concluded our rural sojourn.

“On the removal of the Court to the city, I again returned to my usual avocations, though without resigning the delightful privilege I enjoyed of continual access to the company of my princess ; and the oftener, as I found she dwelt upon my weakness with an eye of tenderness and pity, not of reproach. She still continued to give me open and honourable proofs of her regard, and even to entrust me with her most secret and important views ; more especially in respect to a proposed union with the Duke of York, the King of England’s brother, since united to the Princess of Modena. Nor did she merely make me her counsellor upon the occasion ; she candidly expressed her aversion to the match, and her satisfaction at its rejection.

“About this period, died the empress Margarita-Teresa, of Austria, consort of the Emperor Leopold, without issue : consequently, that great monarch soon directed his views towards another union, and the eyes of the whole world were eagerly fixed upon his future choice. At this time the affair of the Duke of York had already proceeded so far, that the princess would have been compelled to yield a reluctant consent, had not a still more unfortunate proposal intervened. During the whole progress my attention was on the alert, no less from the impassioned interest I felt on my own account, than on that of my princess, whose grief was but too apparent at the idea of being transported into foreign parts ; more especially into a country like Britain, where the unruly genius of the people

threatened equally the sceptres and the lives of its princes. It was my firm resolution to follow in her train wherever she went, preferring continual servitude in such a cause, to all the ease, honours, and emoluments in the world. I valued not the risks and inconveniences I should have to encounter from a nation so inimical to our religion, and to good government as the English.¹

“While, in this trying and perilous conjuncture, I was awaiting day by day tidings of the conclusion of the nuptials, now near at hand, to judge from the frequent departure of messengers on both sides ; what was my secret triumph, when the young princess, one day bursting in upon her attendants, after an audience with the archduchess, selected me from the number, and bade me follow her into the adjoining gallery. There, leaning upon a balcony overhanging the gardens, she thus addressed me, after a few moments’ pause : ‘I know not, count, how you will receive the information I have to communicate, and I am almost doubtful whether I ought to unfold it to you. But as you must still continue to enjoy the privilege of hearing from my own lips whatever concerns my nearest interests, have the goodness to peruse this document, containing the ratification of my marriage with the Emperor Leopold.’

“Having cast my eye over the fatal letters, and even kissed them in token of submission, I threw myself at the princess’s feet, and bowing my head more in sorrow than in submission, I broke out into the following words : ‘I cannot express, most illustrious princess—soon, soon, my empress and my queen—the feelings that agitate my bosom. Must I say, how much rejoiced I feel at the prospect of your glorious rank, so advantageous to all Germany, and to the interests and aggrandisement of the empire ? Truly honoured do I feel ; nor can any words express my gratitude for your condescension in permitting me to hear these tidings from your own lips. It is a

¹Allowance must here be made for the situation and character of the writer, a good Catholic, the subject of a despotic Government, and imbued with all the prejudices of his times.—Tr.

distinction——’——‘Oh no, no distinction,’ interrupted the princess ; ‘for, as heaven is my witness, noble Sigismond, there is nothing in all these magnificent prospects that affords me half so much pleasure as the idea of being enabled to confer upon you far greater distinction than before. Imagine not that this accession of state will ever change my feelings ; the empress of the Romans will find nothing to blame in the princess of Innspruck ; and therefore it is, that I here renew the gift which she formerly gave you. Nor in this, do I the least trench upon the fealty I owe the Emperor, as my liege lord and master ; inasmuch as the sentiment I am bound to preserve towards him is wholly opposite in its nature to the one I mean ever to retain for you throughout a life of innocence, namely, the tenderest friendship. Yes, I am not afraid to repeat it, Count d’Arco, my love for you appears to have been made in heaven ; it is the force of destiny, and the confession of it is due to your superior merit. I have not hitherto asked the least reward for the partiality I entertain towards you : it is now I have to beg a boon of you. It is, that you will consent to share my good fortune with me, nay, to change your country, and absent yourself from me as little as possible. Do this cheerfully, and count upon my gratitude, in proportion as I meet with obedience to these commands. But I must not confer with you longer now ; I well know all you would wish to tell me, and if you can understand my feelings as well without giving them a tongue, even what I have already said were needless.’ Tears started into her eyes at these last words, but she soon repressed them, and without leaving me time to reply, she hastened out of the gallery to rejoin her party.

“Tidings of these illustrious nuptials getting abroad, the city became one scene of festivity, the respective nations resuming all the hilarity and hopes that had recently been clouded by the death of some of their princes, which threatened a loss of successors in several of the most powerful houses of Germany. A sort of general carnival was proclaimed, and the Court, as if to set the most joyous example, ordained, in its liberality, to hold a tourney. It was perhaps, one of the most sumptuous

and magnificent spectacles ever witnessed, the various encounters taking place only between nobles and cavaliers of the most approved courage and illustrious birth. It being usual in Germany to carry the device and the colour of the lady whom the cavalier serves, conferred with her own hand, it was thus ordered on this glorious occasion, as each knight stepped into the field. It happened that one evening, soon after the conclusion of the nuptials, I was in the public audience chamber, then daily held, when some young triflers began to banter me, inquiring whether I had yet received my favourite colour from my mistress. I know not whether they imagined, as was pretty generally credited, that I had never acquired the affection of any lady of the Court, or whether they alluded still more maliciously to the partiality of the empress, as she seemed to suspect—it is certain she looked much displeased, and the more so as the discourse terminated in a burst of laughter. Turning towards me, she said, in the sweetest tone, ‘It is scarcely fair, Count, that while I am present, your modesty should be put to the blush ; you must enter the field as my cavalier ; here is your device,’ untying a green ribbon from her fine arm, which she extended towards me, almost overwhelmed with surprise and joy. Envy and malice became instantly mute, a becoming reverence was felt, and more than one, conversing afterwards upon the beauty and delicacy of the action, declared that they should have valued such a favour beyond the worth of a seignory. The day appointed for the tournament being arrived, as I was standing at the entrance of my apartment arranging the order of my choicest dresses, intending to appear in some of my richest attire, the equerry of the empress appeared with a present of two noble steeds, which her majesty entreated I would accept, as her cavalier upon the approaching occasion. One of these was of Neapolitan breed, a charger of middling height, but full of fire and spirit. It was jet black, richly caparisoned, shining in cloth of silver and gold ; and the other was a Spanish jennet, of mixed colour, small in its limbs, beautifully caparisoned, and swift as a bird upon the course.

"Exactly at the appointed time I entered among the first into the field, bearing in my plumes and ribbons the colours of the empress, who, to complete the honour conferred upon me, appeared arrayed in the same, seated upon a sort of throne in the lodge, surrounded by thousands of spectators. The archduchess dowager was there, rejoicing in the new fortunes of her daughter, with a train of the noblest ladies in the land, who had attended from the most distant provinces to do honour to the occasion.

"Just before I entered the lists I mounted another charger, bestowed likewise by the empress, and rode into the ring. The champion who appeared there was of great strength, valour, and experience, and had already maintained the field against numbers of the boldest challengers. It was now my turn to break a spear with him, and the moment the heralds gave signal to start into action, I turned my eyes towards the Court-lodge, and met those of the empress fixed intently upon me. I felt as if suddenly inspired with more than mortal strength and ardour, and such was the force and fury of my charge, that I not only carried the first, but two following lances ; in short, I bore away the honour of the day.

"Must I confess all my vanity ? such was my secret triumph, that I would not have exchanged it at that moment for the richest diadem. Not that I was ambitious of vulgar applause, but that day I bore the ensign of my empress, and proved myself not unworthy of the high distinction she had conferred upon me. Riding up to the royal lodge, I dismounted at the feet of the two princesses, by whom I was received with expressions of applause. They presented me with a rich sword, adorned with jewels, the prize of the victor of the field ; while the empress herself, in the excess of her generous spirit, drew a fine diamond ring from her finger, and presented it to me with compliments of pleasure and congratulation at my triumph.

"But the consummation of my wretchedness was now at hand ; the empress was preparing to join her august consort,

attended by her mother, with the flower of all her nobility, at Gratz. I made one of her train, no less by command than from an unhappy inclination. Nor among the crowds of distinguished nobles who surrounded her did I seem to lose the least portion of my influence ; she was even more kind and considerate than before, often declaring that, since she was become the spouse of Cæsar, she should be justified in treating her friends with far greater kindness and consideration than she had formerly done : nor was this all, she obtained for me the favour of her imperial consort, which he frequently displayed before all the Court. This was no sooner apparent, than I began to receive the obeisance and respects of my equals and superiors ; all parties courted my attention, and I might well have indulged in a little vanity. But I know not how it was : what to others would have been a source of the richest pleasure, in me gave rise only to feelings of sorrow and regret. I would gladly have exchanged all the power and splendour of Vienna for some quiet refuge in the desert, some secluded abode, such as heaven has here at length assigned me. So far from entertaining an ambition to extend the sphere of my fame and influence beyond the rank which I enjoyed I in vain attempted to interest myself in the intrigues and affairs of state ; I could not enter into the usual pleasures of the Court ; my eyes still wandered, and rested only on the fine features of the empress, absorbed in the contemplation of the mingled majesty, the grace, and the thousand surpassing charms that I found there, and only there. For my passion never betrayed itself beyond my eyes ; but to these, when unobserved, I gave free and ample scope, and they told her eloquently all my hopeless anguish, all my love. And they dwelt upon her unreprieved ; they partook of no other delight ; all else appeared vile and worthless to me ; too happy could I have continued to enjoy the mournful pleasure it afforded me ! Dearly did I pay its price, for my passion was feeding upon my life. I lost all relish for company and conversation, of which she did not form a part, and my health and slumbers became the sacrifice. My pallid looks bore evidence of the

struggles within : I attracted the eyes of the whole Court, and in a short time, I fell sick.

“A slow fever preyed upon my vitals, and the physicians half despaired of my life. It was then I first became sensible how deeply my passion was returned. Whatever the power and influence of a queen could effect in procuring the best attendance and advice ; whatever the tenderness, compassion, and fears of the fondest mother or sister could display, were all lavished upon me at that period. The disease, however, had gained too great force, so that daily becoming weaker, I was soon reduced to extremity ; my life was hourly despaired of, though I still retained all my faculties as clear and lively as before, and was perfectly resigned to my approaching fate. My sole regret was a dread of not again beholding the object of all my hopes and fears, and my weeping eyes were now continually fixed upon her portrait : while thus engaged, taking, as I truly believed, a fervent and final leave of the features of the only beloved object upon earth, I heard a sudden disturbance in the ante-chamber, and a few moments after, the name of the empress was announced. It is quite impossible to convey an idea of the emotions which at that moment swelled my breast ; so violent and yet so delightful was the shock, that I was just on the point of expiring, when the voice of the empress seemed to recall me into renewed existence. Approaching close to my side, she exclaimed in a tremulous and impassioned voice, on beholding the condition to which I was reduced : ‘Alas ! my fond and faithful servant !’ and then in a lower tone, she continued, ‘Ah, Count, and can you leave me thus ? I beseech you to pity me, and live for me ; from my hand receive the renewed health and strength, which your physicians have attempted in vain to bestow. Rouse yourself, receive what I have here brought you, take it, and doubt not of the result,’ and she administered the medicine with her own hands. She had even dropped it into a gold cup, without permitting my nurse to assist her, and I drank the whole off at her command. Whether it were the delight of again beholding her, or the virtue of what she administered, it is certain that I

soon felt greatly restored, so much so, indeed, that shedding tears of gratitude, I assured her in another interview, that I had drunk life from her hands. Though she said little in return, the serenest joy was depicted on her countenance ; she inquired into farther particulars relating to my illness, and the nurse and attendants having withdrawn, out of respect, to a distance, she proceeded to speak more confidentially than she had ever before done : 'Too well, Count, am I aware of the melancholy origin of your sufferings, but do not yield, try to rise above them, and live for the sake of my love.' These words she uttered in so sweet, confiding, and earnest a tone, that I could not for a moment doubt her, and then yielding me her hand, which I pressed ardently to my lips, she left the precious cordial in the gold vase to my care, and took her leave. What with the restorative nature of the elixir, and the joy which her presence had inspired, I felt as if created anew, my fever abated, and I was declared out of all danger. On my perfect recovery, however, I no longer appeared at Court, and in public as before, but secluded myself from state affairs as much as I was permitted. Secret affliction still preyed upon my mind, mournful and appalling images rose in my path, and vainly did I attempt to banish them from my eyes. A deep presentiment of future calamity weighed down my spirit, which future events more than verified. I loved the empress to distraction, I could no longer conceal it either from myself or from her ; and though I offered up unceasing prayers to heaven that I might be enabled to restrain my passion within the due bounds of duty and respect, a thousand schemes for its full indulgence would usurp, in spite of me, the possession of my imagination. With the most gigantic struggles, however, I succeeded in subduing it, more for her sake than my own ; feeling my complete power and ascendancy, I scorned rather than feared to use them. For what, indeed, was life to me, placed in competition with such hopes ? Besides, I took more pride in her grandeur and elevation, than if they had been my own. Yet a deep-seated inquietude had for ever destroyed my bosom's peace : she was great, she tried to make me happy,

but I, I was the most wretched being upon the face of the earth. Ah ! far unhappier, had the veil been then withdrawn from my future destiny, and I could have beheld it in all its naked horrors.

"Thus wearing out my joyless and weary days, it was not long before the empress became aware of the real state of my feelings. She had restored me to fresh life and vigour ; and it seemed only to have added poignancy to my sufferings. Unable to support the sight, she one day called me to attend her, as she was walking in the royal gardens. Alluding at once to the unhappy state of my mind, she said that she often wept bitterly over the misfortunes of the companion and friend of her infancy. She could bear it no longer ; she gently upbraided me for such a sacrifice of my time and talents ; wasting the golden days of youth and manhood, in hopeless sorrow ; a wilful, passionate grief for what never could be obtained. 'Oh, my dear Count d'Arco,' she continued, as the tears came into her eyes, 'if it be any consolation to know you are not the only sufferer (for I cannot see you die), you may indeed be consoled ; I will repeat to you all I formerly promised to you. It is your late conduct that compels me to it ; for it would seem that necessity, and impossibility of success, are no restraint, as in all other cases, upon the excess of your passionate sorrow. Surely I need not remind you, circumstanced as we are, of all that prudence and propriety require from us. What is it you intend, Count ? to live and die thus wilfully unhappy ? No, Heaven forbid ! I would have your love for me produce far nobler fruits ; and as you have always most truly and loyally served me, it would be strange, indeed, were you now to become the author of all my calamity. You are the sole staff and stay of your house, and you ought to think of establishing it in the land. How many in Germany would feel proud of your alliance ! cast your eyes around, and let me know your choice' ; and then she added, in a stifled and trembling voice, 'the emperor and myself will vie with each other in lavishing our regard upon her !' Here she ceased,

as if recovering from a strong effort, while I stood fixed to the earth like a statue, unable to utter any reply. At length raising my eyes to hers, and heaving a deep sigh, I replied, 'Were it in my power, most illustrious lady, to appear as cheerful, as I know the limits of my duty in regard to your imperial highness, you would behold me as happy as I am now hopeless and miserable. What I have most to regret, is the number of your benefits thrown away upon one, who, however grateful, is incapable of taking advantage of them. But as it is the lot of humanity, more or less, to suffer, so it has been my unhappy fate to behold all the most desirable blessings, except the only one I valued, within my grasp ; ambition, wealth, and influence, became in my eyes worse than nothing—emptiness, ashes, dust ! Bitter as it is, I must yield to my destiny ; yet I would not willingly say anything to afflict you, my earliest companion, playfellow, and friend ; alas ! my empress and queen, dreadful consummation of all my woes, forgive me ; I am so very unhappy, far too unhappy to avail myself of your generous proposal. For I had rather suffer increased anguish for my loss, than ever consent to receive consolation in the manner you wish me. Not that I feel less deeply the kind and noble motives that have induced your imperial highness to promote my welfare, by every means in your power, more especially in this last instance, while, at the same time, I beseech you thus, upon my knees, to permit me to decline it !' 'What then,' exclaimed the empress in a disturbed accent, 'you will not allow me to make you happy in my own way !' 'Yes, most honoured and adored lady,' I returned hastily, 'provided Heaven would listen to my vows.' 'And what may they be ?' she rejoined, 'quick, tell me what they are.' 'That I may be speedily restored to the state in which I was, before your majesty saw me ; that I may die ; being unable much longer to sustain the passion that assails me ; that haunts me with the power of a demon, both by day and night, compelling me to break through the bounds of respect and reverence due to you as my empress' ; and bursting

into a fresh flood of tears, I clasped her hands to my lips, as I again fell at her feet.

“ ‘Oh heavens, Sigismond ! what is it you have said ?’ she exclaimed in as angry a tone as she could command ; ‘is this the promise you gave me ? you vowed that you would never leave me, and now we shall be compelled to part for ever. What have I done to offend you, that you should treat me thus ? Have I ever broken the promise I gave you ? Ah, ungrateful Sigismond, you are dissatisfied with the gift of this poor heart ; of a love so different from your own. Should not this be sufficient to banish such a degree of hopeless sorrow from your breast ? Reflect a moment upon my rank ; think how much I have confessed to you, and continue miserable if you can. Hitherto I have shewn the utmost confidence, expecting in return proofs of your fidelity and friendship. Your life is dear to me as my own ; your affliction deprives me of repose ; and if you truly love me, you will endeavour to surmount this idle grief, before you give occasion to the world to treat our names with a degree of freedom fatal to our reputation, our honour, and perhaps our lives.’ Then giving me her hand, not without the deepest emotion on both sides, I pressed it to my lips, and the next moment I found myself alone.

“From that period, though I did not wholly banish my former sorrow, I contrived to dissimulate it better : and on more mature consideration, I felt that the empress had very good reasons for accusing me of ingratitude and indiscretion. Bent upon repressing, as far as possible, the excess of my passion, I resumed my former plan of riding, hunting, engaging in the lists, and entering into all parties, affecting an air of serenity and pleasure that I was far from feeling. I was soon rewarded with the smiles of the empress, and the notice of her august consort, both of whom lavished upon me fresh marks of consideration.

“I persevered in this course for a length of time, and soon began to experience its good effects ; long habit, gradually producing a change in my feelings, led me to dwell less upon

myself, and, finally, upon the origin of all my woes. I became more tranquil, began to feel an interest in the affairs of life, and attended much less frequently in the suite and at the parties of the empress. Just as I began to flatter myself that there was yet something to live for in the world, I heard of the sudden indisposition of her I had so long loved. At first it excited in the physicians no kind of alarm, but it soon became more serious in its progress. The fever increased, while the languid looks and the extreme exhaustion of the patient, after it had been subdued, gave rise to doubts, and doubts to fears. My former passion now revived with redoubled force ; all her kindness and excellence rose fresh to my recollection, and I was truly to be pitied. Finding herself rapidly growing worse, the empress expressed a wish to have her favourite physician Gianforte, sent for from Padua, his reputation having spread throughout all Germany. No one's anxiety equalled mine to hear of his arrival. I set out to hasten his approach, and never was an oracle listened to with half the awe I felt, when he first opened his lips. After hearing the opinion of her other physicians, who seemed to consider her illness more of a chronic, than of an acute kind, he begged to be permitted to see her without loss of time. Upon his return he declared, that so far from there being no immediate danger, as he had been led to expect, he did not think it probable that she could survive many days. Alas ! who could pretend to depict the terrible shock, the horror that thrilled through my veins, when I heard such a prognostic uttered by so celebrated a physician, and in so calm a tone. A sudden feeling of desolation overwhelmed my spirit ; but I am sure you will excuse me ; you will permit me to pass more rapidly over this portion of my story. Enough that the unhappy presage was fulfilled exactly at the period predicted. In her very last moments her thoughts were still with me, and she repeatedly expressed her wish that I might continue in the emperor's favour, and enjoy the same honourable privileges that I had before done. During her illness I had frequent access to her, having ever been one of her most faithful officers, with the full

approbation of the emperor. Often would she raise her languid eyes to mine, with an eloquent appeal I alone could understand ; often murmur some unfinished words, as if aware of her approaching doom. One day feeling herself worse, she sent for me to her bed-side, in the presence of the emperor, and welcoming me with a serene and almost happy air the moment she saw me, she said, 'I wished, my kind Sigismond, to see you once more before I die, in the hope of finding mercy and forgiveness.' I burst into a flood of tears on hearing these words, tears which not even the presence of the emperor could restrain. 'Does it displease you,' she continued, 'that I am going to join the blessed spirits of the faithful and the good, in the mansions of eternal love ? There I may surely be permitted to pray that you may be better rewarded for your long and faithful services, than my shorter sojourn here would permit. I have already recommended all my faithful servants to the emperor, among whom, on every account, he well knows that you occupy the first place.'

"Addressing herself next to her royal consort, she thus continued : 'Did I imagine, my dear lord, that it would prove any alleviation of your regret at my not having presented you with an offspring, to give you one well worthy of your adoption, I would point out Count d'Arco as best entitled to your entire confidence and regard ; for he never betrayed his trust, nor even committed a wrong, I feel well assured.' She then added other wishes, which were lost in my bitter sobs and cries : I was at length obliged to be conveyed almost by force out of the apartment, and laid upon my own couch. Not a moment's rest did I enjoy for a period of many days ; so that, upon hearing of the fatal tidings, I was already in a high fever, which did not however prevent me from rising to behold, for the last time, her beloved remains. Alas ! too surely did I find her laid out in state, surrounded by her weeping domestics and friends. What were the mingled emotions of my bosom, as I approached that spot ! When the funeral torches burst suddenly upon my view ; when I recollected each familiar

place where we had played together as children, grown up together, as it were, in the bonds of youthful innocence, joy, and ripening love, along with all her numerous kindnesses and endearments, I felt struck to the very soul. Still with a kind of reckless wretchedness, I advanced closer to the bier, and gazed wildly and wistfully upon those lovely yet majestic features, until the spectators began to think me either seized suddenly with indisposition, or quite insane. I wept not, I uttered not a word, but I could not remove my eyes from that pale, and gentle, and sweetly majestic face : alas, even in death too lovely and beautiful !

“Upon recovering out of the strange trance in which I had been so long absorbed, I thrice attempted to run my sword through my body, until I was secured and borne away from the distressing scene. Yet such was the degree to which the empress had been beloved by her servants, that even this excited no unusual suspicions ; and when I became somewhat calmer, I seemed to hear a voice that whispered comfort to me, and peace and joy from another sphere. ‘True, too true,’ I exclaimed, as if in answer to the celestial sounds, ‘for what is the end of all the love, the grace, the beauty, and the glory of earthly things ? Place our faith, as we will, upon the world, and the votaries of the world, what shall we finally reap from its rank soil, but ashes, dust, and tears ? My beloved, my soul’s mistress and sovereign, is gone ; and shall I live again to all the follies and vanities of earth, deprived of the light and beauty, the very guiding star of my destiny, and without which I shall be driven upon life’s troubled ocean, at the mercy of darkness, winds, and floods ? Forbid it, heaven ! I would rather, far rather follow thee, O blessed spirit, safely into port, where thou hast taken up thine everlasting rest. But I fear me, I have not strength of wing to raise me to that heavenly height, or merit the assisting influence of thy glory. Yet deign, exalted spirit, to receive the only sacrifice I can make thee—of myself : so may we thus be restored to each other’s love in blissful paradise !’

“From that period, gentle lady, I never left my apartment

until the last obsequies were performed, and even the public mourning at an end. My sufferings, both of mind and body, were extreme ; and when I at length recovered, my first visit was to the emperor. He received me very graciously, doubtless expecting that I had attended for the purpose of aspiring to the enjoyment of some of the fruits of the late empress's kind and earnest recommendations. He seemed a little surprised then, when I candidly informed him that the circumstance of his royal consort's decease had so strongly reminded me of the vanity of all earthly pursuits, that with his imperial majesty's permission, I felt a decided inclination to retire from the tumult and business of Court : moreover, that I so far confided in his royal clemency and compassion, as to hope he would not refuse me his royal leave to take shelter in the secluded hermitage of the Penitent Friars. The emperor regarded me very earnestly some time before he replied : whether he imagined that I was chagrined at losing the support of the empress in the midst of my courtly career, or that he no longer wished to oppose my inclination, even if suspicious of the real cause or not ; certain it is, that he kindly accorded me the space of a year, to consider further of the trial ; so that, if at the close of that period I still persisted in my wish for seclusion, I might pursue my own pleasure. That year he wished me to spend in my travels, as the most likely method of removing my grief, and I consented to the royal wishes. After arranging my domestic affairs, I visited Italy, for the most part from a desire of paying my vows at several celebrated shrines, and beholding the territories of Holy Church.

"Besides my own fortune, I had received handsome presents from the late empress, the most precious of which I carefully preserved. A few of these I deposited, not without many tears, at the shrine of Our Lady of Loreto, adorning the sacred image of the Virgin with gifts, of which I esteemed every inferior object unworthy. The rest of my resources I distributed in pious alms, in sacrificial offerings, and other holy uses, besides daily occupying myself in some works of charity,

which I judged to be the sweetest incense I could offer up to the soul of my beloved, my infant companion, my early friend and benefactress, my sovereign, now no more. In heaven only, where all hearts are known, may she yet be mine !”

(1720-1806)



(Translated by THOMAS ROSCOE)

M E S S E R Gherardo Benvenga was a Venetian silk-mercator, a very pleasant and good kind of man ; and as creditable as you would wish to find any tradesman. Rising early, as usual, one Sunday morning, being the day he had fixed upon, to save time, for the payment of the half year's rent of his shop, he was no sooner washed and dressed than he counted out the money. "First of all," he says, "I will go to Mass, after putting these ten sequins in my purse, and when I have heard Mass, I will just step and despatch this other little affair." He had no sooner said it than he snatched up his mantle, crossed himself devoutly, and sallied forth. Passing along near the said church, he heard, by the tinkling of a little bell, that the Mass was going on. "Oh," he cried, full of unction, "it is going." So he hastens into the church, touches the holy water, and approaches the altar where the priest pronounces the *introibo*. He knelt upon a form, where there was no other person except a very pleasing and good-natured looking lady, adorned in the Venetian fashion, with a Florentine petticoat, and a black silk vest, apparently just from the mercer's, trimmed with sleeves of the finest lace, along with gold rings, bracelets of the richest chain gold, and a necklace set with beautiful diamonds ; while, full of devotion and modesty, she held a very prettily bound book in her hands, from which she was singing hymns like an angel. Messer Gherardo turned his eyes towards her a few moments, anxious to profit by so lovely and edifying an example, without the least alloy of any more terrestrial feeling.

and accordingly drew a little psalter from his pocket, and began, quite absorbed within himself, and shaking his head with emotion, to join in the anthem.

The Mass being at length over, Messer Gherardo bethought himself, according to courteous custom, of making a chaste obeisance to the lady ; but while he was preparing, she had already passed, and he followed, marvelling within himself in what manner she would have returned his intended civility. On getting out, he instinctively took the road to pay his ten pieces to the landlord, an agent for one of the noble Morosini family, and knocking at the door he said : "I am come here to pay money as usual, but you have never yet returned my calls to pay me anything ; come and look at my shop some day ;" and in this jocular strain he thrust his hand into his purse, feeling on all sides without finding a single sequin. "Am I out of my wits?" he cried. "What is this?" and he rolled his eyes like a demoniac, as if under the operation of the bitterest torments. At length, feeling something hard sticking in a corner of his purse, and hastily seizing it, he drew forth a beautiful bracelet of fine gold with diamond clasps, amounting to the value of some two hundred ducats. The poor tradesman was half petrified at the sight. At first, he believed it to be the effect of witchcraft, then a trick ; and was altogether so much at a loss that, turning briskly round, while the agent grinned in his face, he ran down the steps without saying a single word. "Messer Gherardo, good Messer Gherardo," he cried, as he held pen and paper in hand to give him a receipt, "What is the matter?" Then looking out of the window, he beheld him running along at a furious pace, every one making way for him. The agent, shaking his head (for he now thought him a little beside himself), returned to his accounts, regretting only that he had not received the money ; while Messer Gherardo, who had all his wits about him, as far as his interest was concerned, hastened to the house of his friend the goldsmith, anxious to ascertain the value of the toy, in lieu of the sum he had lost. When he heard it amounted to at least two hundred ducats, he suddenly bethought him of the

richly dressed lady, who stood near him at Mass, imagining he had seen it upon her arm, but of this he was not certain. He next conjectured she had played him a trick, but neither the time nor place seemed to warrant such a supposition. Besides he did not know her, nor she him, though he wished to learn where she lived. "I think I have guessed it though now," he exclaimed, as if a sudden bright thought had struck him, "My purse lay beside me ; I was buried in profound devotion, and she, wanting money, thrust her hand into my money bag, and by accident left the bracelet behind her." Yet how to reconcile this, he thought, with so much fashion, beauty, and devotion, as she displayed ? he felt ashamed of such an accusation, and tried to banish it from his mind. He resolved, however, to keep the bracelet, and quietly await the result ; then returning in better spirits to settle his account with the agent, not without some jeers, he pretended to have forgotten the money, which, having now paid, he felt much happier and easier, and, with a smile on both sides, they took leave.

The next day, Messer Gherardo, walking along the streets, observed, upon turning a corner, affixed to a pillar, the following advertisement in large letters : "*Lost or stolen, a rich gold bracelet, with handsome diamond clasps ; whoever will restore it to the owner, by leaving it at the sacristy of Santo Marcuola, shall receive a handsome reward.*" Messer Gherardo, thunderstruck at these words, read them again and again, as he would otherwise have had no scruples in retaining the bracelet. As it was, however, such was the singularity of the case, that he could not help laughing, as he directed his steps towards the said sacristy ; where, upon his arrival, he inquired for the curate. Taking him on one side, he said : "My reverend father, my business with you is no other than a confession, and if you will give me permission, I will inform you. But you must grant me one condition, without which I must take my leave as I came."—"Speak out," replied the curate ; "what is it ? if proper, it is granted." "Then," returned Messer Gherardo, "I am the man who found the bracelet ; but I will never restore it, ex-

cept it be to the lady herself. Now, I beg you will not attribute this to any suspicion, or any improper motive ; only it will be far preferable, on the lady's account, that I should return it to her without other witnesses. If you will be so good as to point out her abode to me, you may rely upon it, that I will go forthwith, like a good subject of the Catholic Church, and return it to the owner ; otherwise you must excuse me. I shall keep the bracelet, and without the slightest scruples of conscience." The curate replied : "To any person who should restore such an ornament, I have received orders to give three sequins, that he might treat himself to a good dram ; but as to you, signor, you are perhaps not in want of one."—"Signor," retorted Messer Gherardo, "I would not return it for a hundred sequins ; but if I may restore it into the lady's own hands, I will require nothing."—"My son," replied the curate, "I would recommend to you to entertain a little more reverence and holy fear of heaven. Surely you would not keep what is not yours ; but as you seem resolved to restore it only to the lady, so be it. I will call my clerk, since you are so very obstinate, and he shall point out to you her dwelling." So, after accompanying him a little way, the little fat clerk said : "That is it, signor," pointing to a very handsome looking and spacious house ; and upon gaining admission he was shewn up a magnificent staircase into a large saloon, the walls all covered with silk linings, the sight of which made the mercer's heart glow ; and such was his confusion at the idea of his temerity in entering, that he could scarcely ascertain the quality of the silk. At first, he thought of making his escape, imagining that he had committed some gross blunder, and might be running his head into a great scrape. While doubtful in what way to act, but gradually edging out, a maid-servant advanced from the staircase, crying, "Who is it ? Pray who are you, and what do you want?" Half struck dumb, with his hat held politely in his hand, Messer Gherardo replied : "I wish to see the lady of the house, and if perfectly convenient to her ladyship, to be permitted to speak with her ;" and this he said in his usual style, when waiting on the great to receive commissions.

"Madam," cried the girl, calling to her mistress in an adjacent apartment, "it is a gentleman who wishes to speak to you about some business."—"Then let him come. Why do not you shew him in?" answered a voice that startled our poor tradesman, as he hastened to obey her commands. Sitting in an easy chair, he discovered, on entering, the same identical beautiful lady whom he had seen at Mass, a surprise that had almost cost him his life, for a few degrees more would infallibly have amounted to a fit of apoplexy. The lady looked full at Messer Gherardo, and grew pale as the wife of Lot when she was turned into a pillar of salt; in fact, she had nearly swooned away; for it had never entered into her head, when she first missed her bracelet, that she could have left it behind on withdrawing her hand out of the old gentleman's purse. But such was her hurry to secure the ten pieces, which she effectually did, as she observed him absorbed in his devotions, that it is hardly surprising she was not aware of the loss of it, when it came unclasped. On the other hand, she concluded she must have lost it on the road from church, or she would never have had the folly to advertise it. Little did she think, then, such shame and exposure were reserved for her. But heaven, that frequently punishes guilty mortals in a way they least expect, never fails to overtake offenders. Messer Gherardo, in his turn, fixed his eyes upon the lady, whose looks were still directed towards him, neither of them uttering a word. At length, however, our tradesman, being naturally possessed of much presence of mind and discrimination, further disciplined by his habit of attending to all ranks and descriptions of purchasers, pulled the fatal bracelet from his pocket, and holding it by one end, proceeded to observe: "I am at a loss, Madam, to say in what manner the accident occurred; it is plain that you lost this bracelet, but the wretch has stolen ten sequins out of my purse. Yet you see I have caught him, and hold him fast by the hair," shewing the bracelet in his hand; "and if he refuses to make restitution of my money, which is my heart's blood, I will put him into such durance, that you will never have the pleasure of beholding

the offender again. I know that he is a familiar friend, very dear to you, and that you love him as well as woman ever loved such pretty things. For the sake of your reputation, and of your family, then, I would advise you to pay his fine, or I will take such revenge upon him, as will prove very disagreeable to you. If, on the other hand, you consent to pay what he owes me, the scandal of this affair shall go no further than ourselves, and I will set the thief free ; not, however, without desiring you to give him a word of advice for the future, and a little correction at your hands, such as he will remember to the latest day of his life." In spite of her confusion, the lady could not avoid bursting into a fit of laughter, as he concluded ; and upon recovering her presence of mind, she adopted the most prudent course, by walking to her desk, and taking out ten sequins, perhaps the identical pieces she had pilfered, and which had arrested the guilty bracelet in the very act. Turning towards Messer Gherardo, she said : "I vow, my dear Signor, that the moment the rogue had committed the deed, he ran away from me, dreading my displeasure. Here is the money he stole ; and since you are pleased to set him at liberty, and to keep the affair secret, which I entreat you to do, I shall consider myself eternally bound to you. As you say, I will keep him in order for the future, and prevent the possibility of his becoming guilty of such an offence again." She then counted the pieces into his hand, and received the bracelet in return ; and after a few more ceremonies, the good man took his leave. It is certain that this lady was a woman of fashion, of respectable family and connexions, the wife of a wealthy citizen, too fond of gaiety and extravagance. Her husband not supplying her fast enough with money for dresses and play, she was in the habit of drawing from other resources, in the manner we have here detailed. It is thus that our errors and vices obscure the intellect, and lead us gradually into the abyss of ruin.



ALESSANDRO MANZONI

(1785-1873)



THE MAKING OF A NUN

(Translated by —)

S H E was the youngest daughter of the Prince * * *, a Milanese nobleman, who was esteemed one of the richest men of the city. But the unbounded idea he entertained of his title made his property appear scarcely sufficient, nay, even too limited to maintain a proper appearance ; and all his attention was turned towards keeping it, at least, such as it was, in one line, so far as it depended upon himself. How many children he had does not appear from history : it merely records that he had designed all the younger branches of both sexes for the cloister, that he might leave his property entire to the eldest son, destined to perpetuate the family : that is, bring up children that he might torment himself in tormenting them after his father's example. Our unhappy Signora was yet unborn when her condition was irrevocably determined upon. It only remained to decide whether she should be a monk or a nun, a decision, for which, not her assent, but her presence, was required. When she was born, the Prince, her father, wishing to give her a name that would always immediately suggest the idea of a cloister, and which had been borne by a saint of high family, called her Gertrude. Dolls dressed like nuns were the first playthings put into her hands ; then images in nuns' habits, accompanying the gift with admonitions to prize them highly, as very precious things, and with that

affirmative interrogation, 'Beautiful, eh?' When the Prince, or the Princess, or the young prince, the only one of the sons brought up at home, would represent the happy prospects of the child, it seemed as if they could find no other way of expressing their ideas than by the words, 'What a lady-abbess!' No one, however, directly said to her, 'You must become a nun.' It was an intention understood and touched upon incidentally in every conversation relating to her future destiny. If at any time the little Gertrude indulged in rebellious or imperious behaviour, to which her natural disposition easily inclined her, 'You are a naughty little girl,' they would say to her: 'this behaviour is very unbecoming. When you are a lady-abbess, you shall then command with the rod: you can then do as you please.' On another occasion, the Prince reproving her for her too free and familiar manners, into which she easily fell: 'Hey! hey!' he cried; 'they are not becoming to one of your rank. If you wish some day to engage the respect that is due to you, learn from henceforth to be more reserved: remember you ought to be in everything the first in the monastery, because you carry your rank wherever you go.'

Such language imbued the mind of the little girl with the implicit idea that she was to be a nun; but her father's words had more effect upon her than all the others put together. The manners of the Prince were habitually those of an austere master, but when treating of the future prospects of his children, there shone forth in every word and tone an immovability of resolution which inspired the idea of a fatal necessity.

At six years of age, Gertrude was placed for education, and still more as a preparatory step towards the vocation imposed upon her, in the monastery of Monza; and the selection of the place was not without design. The Prince enjoyed here very great authority, and thought that here, better than elsewhere, his daughter would be treated with that distinction and deference which might induce her to choose this monastery as her perpetual abode. Nor was he deceived: the then abbess and several intriguing nuns—who had the management of affairs, finding themselves entangled in some disputes with

another monastery, and with a noble family of the country, were very glad of the acquisition of such a support—received with much gratitude the honour bestowed upon them, and fully entered into the intentions of the Prince concerning the permanent settlement of his daughter ; intentions on every account entirely consonant with their interests. Immediately on Gertrude's entering the monastery, she was called *par excellence* the Signorina. A separate place was assigned her at table, and a private sleeping apartment ; her conduct was proposed as an example to others ; indulgences and caresses were bestowed upon her without end, accompanied with that respectful familiarity so attractive to children, when observed in those whom they see treating other children with an habitual air of superiority. Not that all the nuns had conspired to draw the poor child into the snare ; many there were of simple and undesigning minds, who would have shrunk with horror from the thought of sacrificing a child to interested views ; but all of them being intent on their several individual occupations, some did not notice all these manœuvres, others did not discern how dishonest they were ; some abstained from looking into the matter, and others were silent rather than give useless offence. There was one, too, who, remembering how she had been induced by similar arts to do what she afterwards repented of, felt a deep compassion for the poor little innocent, and showed that compassion by bestowing on her tender and melancholy caresses, which she was far from suspecting were tending towards the same result ; and thus the affair proceeded. Perhaps it might have gone on thus to the end, if Gertrude had been the only little girl in the monastery ; but, among her school-fellows, there were some who knew they were designed for marriage. The little Gertrude, brought up with high ideas of her superiority, talked very magnificently of her future destiny as abbess and principal of the monastery ; she wished to be an object of envy to the others on every account, and saw with astonishment and vexation that some of them paid no attention to all her boasting. To the majestic, but circumscribed and cold, images the headship

of a monastery could furnish, they opposed the varied and bright pictures of a husband, guests, routs, towns, tournaments, retinues, dress, and equipages. Such glittering visions roused in Gertrude's mind that excitement and ardour which a large basket-full of freshly-gathered flowers would produce, if placed before a beehive. Her parents and teachers had cultivated and increased her natural vanity, to reconcile her to the cloisters ; but when this passion was excited by ideas so much calculated to stimulate it, she quickly entered into them with a more lively and spontaneous ardour. That she might not be below her companions, and influenced at the same time by her new turn of mind, she replied that, at the time of decision, no one could compel her to take the veil without her consent ; that she, too, could marry, live in a palace, enjoy the world, and that better than any of them ; that she *could* if she wished it, that she *would* if she wished it ; and that, in fact, she *did* wish it. The idea of the necessity of her consent, which hitherto had been, as it were, unnoticed, and hidden in a corner of her mind, now unfolded and displayed itself in all its importance. On every occasion she called it to her aid, that she might enjoy in tranquillity the images of a self-chosen future. Together with this idea, however, there invariably appeared another ; that the refusal of this consent involved rebellion against her father, who already believed it, or pretended to believe it, a decided thing ; and at this remembrance, the child's mind was very far from feeling the confidence which her words proclaimed. She would then compare herself with her companions, whose confidence was of a far different kind, and experienced lamentably that envy of their condition which, at first, she endeavoured to awaken in them. From envy she changed to hatred ; which she displayed in contempt, rudeness, and sarcastic speeches ; while, sometimes, the conformity of her inclinations and hopes with theirs, suppressed her spite, and created in her an apparent and transient friendship. At times, longing to enjoy something real and present, she would feel a complacency in the distinctions accorded to her, and make others sensible of this

superiority ; and then, again, unable to tolerate the solitude of her fears and desires, she would go in search of her companions, her haughtiness appeased, almost, indeed, imploring of them kindness, counsel, and encouragement. In the midst of such pitiable warfare with herself and others, she passed her childhood, and entered upon that critical age at which an almost mysterious power seems to take possession of the soul, arousing, refreshing, invigorating all the inclinations and ideas, and sometimes transforming them, or turning them into some unlooked-for channel. That which, until now, Gertrude had most distinctly figured in these dreams of the future, was external splendour and pomp ; a something soothing and kindly, which, from the first, was lightly, and, as it were, mistily, diffused over her mind, now began to spread itself and predominate in her imagination. It took possession of the most secret recesses of her heart, as of a gorgeous retreat ; hither she retired from present objects ; here she entertained various personages strangely compounded of the confused remembrances of childhood, the little she had seen of the external world, and what she had gathered in conversations with her companions ; she entertained herself with them, talked to them, and replied in their name ; here she gave commands, and here she received homage of every kind. At times, the thoughts of religion would come to disturb these brilliant and toilsome revels. But religion, such as it had been taught to this poor girl, and such as she had received it, did not prohibit pride, but rather sanctified it, and proposed it as a means of obtaining earthly felicity. Robbed thus of its essence, it was no longer religion, but a phantom like the rest. In the intervals in which this phantom occupied the first place, and ruled in Gertrude's fancy, the unhappy girl, oppressed by confused terrors, and urged by an indefinite idea of duty, imagined that her repugnance to the cloister, and her resistance to the wishes of her superiors in the choice of her state of life, was a fault ; and she resolved in her heart to expiate it, by voluntarily taking the veil.

It was a rule, that, before a young person could be received

as a nun, she should be examined by an ecclesiastic, called the vicar of the nuns, or by some one deputed by him ; that it might be seen whether the lot were her deliberate choice or not ; and this examination could not take place for a year after she had, by a written request, signified her desire to the vicar. Those nuns who had taken upon themselves the sad office of inducing Gertrude to bind herself for ever with the least possible consciousness of what she was doing, seized one of the moments we have described to persuade her to write and sign such a memorial. And, in order the more easily to persuade her to such a course, they failed not to affirm and impress upon her, what, indeed, was quite true, that, after all, it was a mere formality, which could have no effect, without other and posterior steps, depending entirely upon her own will. Nevertheless the memorial had scarcely reached its destination, before Gertrude repented having written it. Then she repented of these repentances ; and thus days and months were spent in an incessant alternation of wishes and regrets. For a long while she concealed this act from her companions ; sometimes from fear of exposing her good resolution to opposition and contradiction, at others from shame at revealing her error ; but, at last, the desire of unburdening her mind, and of seeking advice and encouragement, conquered.

Another rule was this : that a young girl was not to be admitted to this examination upon the course of life she had chosen, until she had resided for at least a month out of the convent where she had been educated. A year had almost passed since the presentation of this memorial ; and it had been signified to Gertrude that she would shortly be taken from the monastery, and sent to her father's house, for this one month, there to take all the necessary steps towards the completion of the work she had in fact begun. The Prince, and the rest of the family, considered it an assured thing, as if it had already taken place. Not so, however, his daughter ; instead of taking fresh steps she was engaged in considering how she could withdraw the first. In her perplexity, she resolved to open her mind to one of her companions, the most

sincere and always the readiest to give spirited advice. She advised Gertrude to inform her father, by letter, that she had changed her mind, since she had not the courage to pronounce to his face, at the proper time, a bold *I will not*. And as gratuitous advice in this world is very rare, the counsellor made Gertrude pay for this by abundance of raillery upon her want of spirit. The letter was agreed upon with three or four confidantes, written in private, and despatched by means of many deeply-studied artifices. Gertrude waited with great anxiety for a reply ; but none came ; excepting that, a few days afterwards, the Abbess, taking her aside, with an air of mystery, displeasure, and compassion, let fall some obscure hints about the great anger of her father, and a wrong step she must have been taking ; leaving her to understand, however, that if she behaved well, she might still hope that all would be forgotten. The poor young girl understood it, and dared not venture to ask any further explanation.

At last, the day so much dreaded, and so ardently wished for, arrived. Although Gertrude knew well enough that she was going to a great struggle, yet to leave the monastery, to pass the bounds of those walls in which she had been for eight years immured, to traverse the open country in a carriage, to see once more the city and her home, filled her with sensations of tumultuous joy. As to the struggle, with the direction of her confidantes, she had already taken her measures, and concerted her plans. Either they will force me, thought she, and then I will be immovable—I will be humble and respectful, but will refuse ; the chief point is not to pronounce another ‘*Yes*,’ and I will not pronounce it. Or they will catch me with good words ; and I will be better than they ; I will weep, I will implore, I will move them to pity ; at last, will only entreat that I may not be sacrificed. But, as it often happens in similar cases of foresight, neither one nor the other supposition was realised. Days passed and neither her father, nor any one else, spoke to her about the petition, or the recantation ; and no proposal was made to her, with either coaxing or threatening. Her parents were serious, sad, and morose, towards her,

without ever giving a reason for such behaviour. It was only to be understood that they regarded her as faulty and unworthy ; a mysterious anathema seemed to hang over her, and divide her from the rest of her family, merely suffering so much intercourse as was necessary to make her feel her subjection. Seldom, and only at certain fixed hours, was she admitted to the company of her parents and elder brother. In the conversations of these three there appeared to reign a great confidence, which rendered the exclusion of Gertrude doubly sensible and painful. No one addressed her ; and if she ventured timidly to make a remark, unless very evidently called for, her words were either unnoticed, or were responded to by a careless, contemptuous, or severe look. If unable any longer to endure so bitter and humiliating a distinction, she sought and endeavoured to mingle with the family, and implored a little affection ; she soon heard some indirect but clear hint thrown out about her choice of a monastic life, and was given to understand that there was one way of regaining the affection of the family ; and since she would not accept of it on these conditions, she was obliged to draw back, to refuse the first advances towards the kindness she so much desired, and to continue in her state of excommunication ; continue in it, too, with a certain appearance of being to blame.

Such impressions from surrounding objects painfully contradicted the bright visions with which Gertrude had been so much occupied, and which she still secretly indulged in her heart. She had hoped that, in her splendid and much-frequented home, she should have enjoyed at least some real taste of the pleasures she had so long imagined : but she found herself woefully deceived. The confinement was as strict and close at home as in the convent ; to walk out for recreation was never even spoken of ; and a gallery that led from the house to an adjoining church, obviated the sole necessity there might have been to go into the street. The company was more uninteresting, more scarce, and less varied than in the monastery. At every announcement of a visitor, Gertrude was obliged to go upstairs, and remain with some old woman in

the service of the family ; and here she dined whenever there was company. The domestic servants concurred in behaviour and language with the example and intentions of their master ; and Gertrude, who by inclination would have treated them with lady-like unaffected familiarity, and who, in the rank in which she was placed, would have esteemed it a favour if they had shown her any little mark of kindness as an equal, and even have stooped to ask it, was now humbled and annoyed at being treated with a manifest indifference, although accompanied by a slight obsequiousness of formality. She could not, however, but observe, that one of these servants, a page, appeared to bear her a respect very different from the others, and to feel a peculiar kind of compassion for her. The behaviour of this youth approached more nearly than anything she had yet seen to the state of things that Gertrude had pictured to her imagination, and more resembled the doings of her ideal characters. By degrees, a strange transformation was discernible in the manners of the young girl ; there appeared a new tranquillity, and at the same time a restlessness, differing from her usual disquietude ; her conduct was that of one who had found a treasure which oppresses him, which he incessantly watches, and hides from the views of others. Gertrude kept her eyes on this page more closely than ever ; and, however it came to pass, she was surprised one unlucky morning by a chamber-maid, while secretly folding up a letter, in which it would have been better had she written nothing. After a brief altercation, the maid got possession of the letter, and carried it to her master. The terror of Gertrude at the sound of his footsteps, may be more easily imagined than described. It was *her* father ; he was irritated, and she felt herself guilty. But when he stood before her with that frowning brow, and the ill-fated letter in his hand, she would gladly have been a hundred feet underground, not to say in a cloister. His words were few, but terrible ; the punishment named at the time was only to be confined in her own room under the charge of the maid who had made the discovery ; but this was merely a foretaste, a

temporary provision ; he threatened, and left a vague promise of some other obscure, undefined, and therefore more dreadful punishment.

The page was, of course, immediately dismissed, and was menaced with something terrible, if ever he should breathe a syllable about the past. In giving him this intimation, the Prince seconded it with two solemn blows, to associate in his mind with this adventure a remembrance that would effectually remove every temptation to make a boast of it. Some kind of pretext to account for the dismissal of a page was not difficult to find ; as to the young lady, it was reported that she was ill.

She was now left to her fears, her shame, her remorse, and her dread of the future, with the sole company of this woman, whom she hated as the witness of her guilt, and the cause of her disgrace. She, in her turn, hated Gertrude, by whom she was reduced, she knew not for how long, to the wearisome life of a jailer, and had become for ever the guardian of a dangerous secret.

The first confused tumult of these feelings subsided by degrees ; but each remembrance recurring by turns to Gertrude's mind, was nourished there, and remained to torment her more distinctly, and at leisure. Whatever could the punishment be, so mysteriously threatened ? Many, various, and strange, were the ideas that suggested themselves to the ardent and inexperienced imagination of Gertrude. The prospect that appeared most probable was, that she would be taken back to the monastery at Monza, no longer to appear as the Signorina, but as a guilty person, to be shut up there—who knew how long ! who knew with what kind of treatment ! Among the many annoyances of such a course, perhaps the most annoying was the dread of the shame she should feel. The expressions, the words, the very commas of the unfortunate letter, were turned over and over in her memory : she fancied them noticed and weighed by a reader so unexpected, so different from the one to whom they were destined in reply ; she imagined that they might have come under the view of her

mother, her brother, or indeed any one else ; and by comparison, all the rest seemed to her a mere nothing. The image of him who had been the primary cause of all this offence failed not also frequently to beset the poor recluse ; and it is impossible to describe the strange contrast this phantasm presented to those around her ; so dissimilar, so serious, reserved, and threatening. But, since she could not separate his image from theirs, nor turn for a moment to those transient gratifications, without her present sorrows, as the consequence of them, and wean herself from such thoughts, she no longer willingly indulged in the bright and splendid fancies of her earlier days ; they were too much opposed to her real circumstances, and to every probability for the future. The only castle in which Gertrude could conceive a tranquil and honourable retreat, which was not in the air, was the monastery, if she could make up her mind to enter it for ever. Such a resolution, she could not doubt, would have repaired everything, atoned for every fault, and changed her condition in a moment. Opposed to this proposal, it is true, rose up the plans and hopes of her whole childhood : but times were changed : and in the depths to which Gertrude had fallen, and in comparison of what, at times, she so much dreaded, the condition of a nun, respected, revered, and obeyed, appeared to her a bright prospect. Two sentiments of very different character, indeed, contributed, at intervals, to overcome her former aversion ; sometimes remorse for a fault, and a capricious sensibility of devotion ; and at other times, her pride embittered and irritated by the manners of her jailer, who (often, it must be confessed, provoked to it) revenged herself now by terrifying her with the prospect of the threatened punishment, or taunting her with the disgrace of her fault. When, however, she chose to be benign, she would assume a tone of protection, still more odious than insult. On these different occasions, the wish that Gertrude felt to escape from her clutches, and to raise herself to a condition above either her anger or pity, became so vivid and urgent, that it made everything which could lead to such an end appear pleasant and agreeable.

At the end of four or five long days of confinement, Gertrude, disgusted and exasperated beyond measure by one of these sallies of her guardian, went and sat down in a corner of the room, and covering her face with her hands, remained for some time secretly indulging her rage. She then felt an overbearing longing to see some other faces, to hear some other words, to be treated differently. She thought of her father, of her family ; and the idea made her shrink back in horror. But she remembered that it only depended upon her to make them her friends ; and this remembrance awakened a momentary joy. Then there followed a confused and unusual sorrow for her fault, and an equal desire to expiate it. Not that her will was already determined upon such a resolution, but she had never before approached it so near. She rose from her seat, went to the table, took up the fatal pen, and wrote a letter to her father, full of enthusiasm and humiliation, of affliction and hope, imploring his pardon, and showing herself indefinitely ready to do anything that would please him who alone could grant it.

There are times when the mind, of the young especially, is so disposed, that any external influence, however slight, suffices to call forth whatever has the appearance of virtuous self-sacrifice ; as a scarcely-expanded flower abandons itself negligently to its fragile stem, ready to yield its fragrance to the first breath of the zephyrs that float around. These moments, which others should regard with reverential awe, are exactly those which the wily and interested eagerly watch for, and seize with avidity, to fetter an unguarded will.

On the perusal of this letter the Prince instantly saw a door opened to the fulfilment of his early and still cherished views. He therefore sent to Gertrude to come to him, and prepared to strike the iron while it was hot. Gertrude had no sooner made her appearance, than, without raising her eyes towards her father, she threw herself upon her knees, scarcely able to articulate the word 'Pardon.' The Prince beckoned to her to rise, and then, in a voice little calculated to reassure her, replied, that it was not sufficient to desire and solicit forgive-

ness, for that was easy and natural enough to one who had been convicted of a fault, and dreaded its punishment ; that, in short, it was necessary she should deserve it. Gertrude, in a subdued and trembling voice, asked what she must do. To this question the Prince (for we cannot find in our heart at this moment to give him the title of father) made no direct reply, but proceeded to speak at some length on Gertrude's fault, in words which grated upon the feelings of the poor girl like the drawing of a rough hand over a wound. He then went on to say, that even if . . . supposing he ever . . . had had at the first any intention of settling her in the world, she herself had now opposed an insuperable obstacle to such a plan ; since a man of honour, as he was, could never bring himself to give to any gentleman a daughter who had shown such a specimen of her character. His wretched auditor was completely overwhelmed ; and then the Prince, gradually softening his voice and language, proceeded to say, that for every fault there was a remedy and a hope of mercy : that hers was one the remedy for which was very distinctly indicated ; that she ought to see in this sad event a warning, as it were, that a worldly life was too full of danger for her. . . .

'Ah, yes !' exclaimed Gertrude, excited by fear, subdued by a sense of shame, and overcome at the instant by a momentary tenderness of spirit.

'Ah ; you see it too,' replied the Prince, instantly taking up her words. 'Well, let us say no more of what is past : all is cancelled. You have taken the only honourable and suitable course that remained for you ; but, since you have chosen it willingly and cheerfully, it rests with me to make it pleasant to you in every possible way. I have the power of turning it to your advantage, and giving all the merit of the action to yourself, and I'll engage to do it for you.' So saying, he rang a little bell that stood on the table, and said to the servant who answered it,—'The Princess and the young Prince immediately.' Then turning to Gertrude, he continued : 'I wish them to share in my satisfaction at once ; and I wish you immediately to be treated by all as is fit and proper. You have experienced

a little of the severe parent, but from henceforth you shall find me an affectionate father.'

Gertrude stood thunderstruck at these words. One moment she wondered how that 'yes,' which had escaped her lips, could be made to mean so much : then she thought, Was there no way of retracting—of restricting the sense ? but the Prince's conviction seemed so unshaken, his joy so sensitively jealous, and his benignity so conditional, that Gertrude dared not utter a word to disturb them in the slightest degree.

The parties summoned quickly made their appearance, and, on seeing Gertrude, regarded her with an expression of surprise and uncertainty. But the Prince, with a cheerful and loving countenance, which immediately met with an answering look from them, said,—'Behold the wandering sheep ; and I intend this to be the last word that shall awaken sad remembrances. Behold the consolation of the family ! Gertrude no longer needs advisers, for she has voluntarily chosen what we desired for her good. She has determined—she has given me to understand that she has determined . . .' Here Gertrude raised towards her father a look between terror and supplication, as if imploring him to pause, but he continued boldly : 'that she has determined to take the veil.'

'*Brava ! well done !*' exclaimed the mother and son, turning at the same time to embrace Gertrude, who received these congratulations with tears, which were interpreted as tears of satisfaction. The Prince then expatiated upon what he would do to render the situation of his daughter pleasant, and even splendid. He spoke of the distinction with which she would be regarded in the monastery and the surrounding country : that she would be like a princess, the representative of the family ; that, as soon as ever her age would allow of it, she would be raised to the first dignity, and in the meanwhile would be under subjection only in name. The Princess and the young Prince renewed their congratulations and applauses, while poor Gertrude stood as if possessed by a dream.

'We had better fix a day for going to Monza to make our request of the Abbess,' said the Prince. 'How pleased she will

be ! I venture to say that all the monastery will know how to estimate the honour which Gertrude does them. Likewise . . . but why not go this very day ? Gertrude will be glad to take an airing.'

'Let us go, then,' said the Princess.

'I will go and give orders,' said the young Prince.

'But . . .' suggested Gertrude submissively.

'Softly, softly,' replied the Prince, 'let her decide : perhaps she does not feel inclined to-day, and would rather delay till to-morrow. Tell me, would you prefer to-day or to-morrow ?'

'To-morrow,' answered Gertrude in a faint voice, thinking it something that she could get a little longer respite.

'To-morrow,' pronounced the Prince, solemnly ; 'she has decided that we go to-morrow. In the meanwhile I will go and ask the vicar of the nuns to name a day for the examination.'

No sooner said than done ; the Prince took his departure, and absolutely went himself (no little act of condescension) to the vicar, and obtained a promise that he would attend her the day after to-morrow.

During the remainder of this day Gertrude had not two moments of quiet. She wished to have calmed her mind after so many scenes of excitement, to clear and arrange her thoughts, to render an account to herself of what she had done, and of what she was about to do, determine what she wished, and, for a moment at least, retard that machine, which, once started, was proceeding so precipitously ; but there was no opening. Occupations succeeded one another without interruption—one treading, as it were, upon the heels of another. Immediately after this solemn interview, she was conducted to her mother's dressing-room, there, under her superintendence, to be dressed and adorned by her own waiting-maid. Scarcely was this business completed when dinner was announced. Gertrude was greeted on her way by the bows of the servants, who expressed their congratulations for her recovery ; and, on reaching the dining-room, she found a few of their nearest friends, who had been hastily invited to do

her honour, and to share in the general joy for the two happy events,—her restored health, and her choice of a vocation.

The young bride—(as the novices were usually distinguished, and Gertrude was saluted on all sides by this title on her first appearance)—the young bride had enough to do to reply to all the compliments that were addressed to her. She was fully sensible that every one of these answers was, as it were, an assent and confirmation ; yet how could she reply otherwise ? Shortly after dinner came the driving hour, and Gertrude accompanied her mother in a carriage, with two uncles who had been among the guests. After the usual tour, they entered the Strada Marina, which crossed the space now occupied by the public gardens, and was the rendezvous of the gentry who drove out for recreation after the labours of the day. The uncles addressed much of their conversation to Gertrude, as was to be expected on such a day ; and one of them, who seemed to be acquainted with everybody, every carriage, every livery, and had every moment something to say about Signor This and Lady That, suddenly checked himself, and turning to his niece—‘Ah, you young rogue !’ exclaimed he ; ‘you are turning your back on all these follies,—you are one of the saints ; we poor worldly fellows are caught in the snare, but you are going to lead a religious life, and go to heaven in your carriage.’

As evening approached they returned home, and the servants, hastily descending to meet them with lights, announced several visitors who were awaiting their return. The rumour had spread, and friends and relations crowded to pay their respects. On entering the drawing-room the young bride became the idol—the sole object of attention—the victim. Every one wished to have her to himself ; one promised her pleasures—another visits ; one spoke of *Madre* this, her relation,—another of *Madre* that, an acquaintance ; one extolled the climate of Monza,—another enlarged with great eloquence upon the distinctions she would there enjoy. Others, who had not yet succeeded in approaching Gertrude while thus besieged, stood watching their opportunity to address her, and

felt a kind of regret until they had discharged their duty in this matter. By degrees the party dispersed, and Gertrude remained alone with the family.

'At last,' said the Prince, 'I have had the pleasure of seeing my daughter treated as becomes her rank. I must confess that she has conducted herself very well, and has shown that she will not be prevented making the first figure, and maintaining the dignity of the family.' They then went to supper, so as to retire early, that they might be ready in good time in the morning.

Gertrude, annoyed, piqued, and at the same time a little puffed up by the compliments and ceremonies of the day, at this moment remembered all she had suffered from her jailer ; and, seeing her father so ready to gratify her in everything but one, she resolved to make use of this disposition for the indulgence of at least one of the passions which tormented her. She displayed a great unwillingness again to be left alone with her maid, and complained bitterly of her treatment.

'What !' said the Prince, 'did she not treat you with respect ? To-morrow I will reward her as she deserves. Leave it to me, and I will get you entire satisfaction. In the meanwhile, a child with whom I am so well pleased must not be attended by a person she dislikes.' So saying, he called another servant, and gave her orders to wait upon Gertrude, who, though certainly enjoying the satisfaction she received, was astonished at finding it so trifling, in comparison with the earnest wishes she had felt beforehand. The thought that, in spite of her unwillingness, predominated in her imagination, was the remembrance of the fearful progress she had this day made towards her cloistral life, and the consciousness that to draw back now would require a far, far greater degree of courage and resolution than would have sufficed a few days before, and which, even *then*, she felt she did not possess.

The woman appointed to attend her was an old servant of the family, who had formerly been the young Prince's governess, having received him from the arms of his nurse, and brought him up until he was almost a young man. In him she

had centred all her pleasures, all her hopes, all her pride. She was delighted at this day's decision, as if it had been her own good fortune ; and Gertrude, at the close of the day, was obliged to listen to the congratulations, praises, and advice of this old woman. She told her of some of her aunts and near relations who had been very happy as nuns, because, being of so high a family, they had always enjoyed the first honours, and had been able to have a good deal of influence beyond the walls of the convent ; so that, from their parlour, they had come off victorious in undertakings in which the first ladies of the land had been quite foiled. She talked to her about the visits she would receive ; she would some day be seeing the Signor Prince with his bride, who must certainly be some noble lady ; and then not only the monastery, but the whole country would be in excitement. The old woman talked while undressing Gertrude ; she talked after she had lain down, and even continued talking after Gertrude was asleep. Youth and fatigue had been more powerful than cares. Her sleep was troubled, disturbed, and full of tormenting dreams, but was unbroken, until the shrill voice of the old woman aroused her to prepare for her journey to Monza.

‘Up, up, Signora bride ; it is broad daylight, and you will want at least an hour to dress and arrange yourself. The Signora Princess is getting up ; they awoke her four hours earlier than usual. The young Prince has already been down to the stables and come back, and is ready to start whenever you are. The creature is as brisk as a hare ! but he was always so from a child : I have a right to say so who have nursed him in my arms. But when he's once set a-going, it won't do to oppose him ; for, though he is the best-tempered creature in the world, he sometimes gets impatient and storms. Poor fellow ! one must pity him ; it is all the effect of his temperament ; and, besides, this time there is some reason in it, because he is going to all this trouble for you. People must take care how they touch him at such times ! he minds no one except the Signor Prince. But some day he will be the Prince himself ; may it be as long as possible first, however. Quick,

quick, Signorina, why do you look at me as if you were bewitched? You ought to be out of your nest at this hour.'

At the idea of the impatient Prince all the other thoughts which had crowded into Gertrude's mind on awaking vanished before it, like a flock of sparrows on the sudden appearance of a scarecrow. She instantly obeyed, dressed herself in haste, and, after submitting to the decoration of her hair and person, went down to the saloon, where her parents and brother were assembled. She was then led to an arm-chair, and a cup of chocolate was brought to her, which in those days was a ceremony similar to that formerly in use among the Romans, of presenting the *toga virilis*.

When the carriage was at the door, the Prince drew his daughter aside, and said: 'Come, Gertrude, yesterday you had every attention paid you; to-day you must overcome yourself. The point is now to make a proper appearance in the monastery and the surrounding country, where you are destined to take the first place. They are expecting you.' (It is unnecessary to say that the Prince had despatched a message the preceding day to the Lady Abbess.) 'They are expecting you, and all eyes will be upon you. You must maintain dignity and an easy manner. The Abbess will ask you what you wish, according to the usual form. You must reply that you request to be allowed to take the veil in the monastery where you have been so lovingly educated, and have received so many kindnesses, which is the simple truth. You will pronounce these words with an unembarrassed air; for I would not have it said that you have been drawn in, and that you don't know how to answer for yourself. These good mothers know nothing of the past: it is a secret which must remain for ever buried in the family. Take care you don't put on a sorrowful or dubious countenance, which might excite any suspicion. Show of what blood you are: be courteous and modest; but remember that there, away from the family, there will be nobody above you.'

Without waiting for a reply, the Prince led the way, Gertrude, the Princess, and the young Prince, following; and,

going downstairs they seated themselves in the carriage. The snares and vexations of the world, and the happy, blessed life of the cloister, more especially for young people of noble birth, were the subjects of conversation during the drive. On approaching their destination the Prince renewed his instructions to his daughter, and repeated over to her several times the prescribed form of reply. On entering this neighbourhood, Gertrude felt her heart beat violently ; but her attention was suddenly arrested by several gentlemen, who stopped the carriage and addressed numberless compliments to her. The continuing their way, they drove slowly up to the monastery, amongst the inquisitive gazes of the crowds who had collected upon the road. When the carriage stopped before these well-known walls, and that dreaded door, Gertrude's heart beat still more violently. They alighted between two wings of bystanders, whom the servants were endeavouring to keep back, and the consciousness that the eyes of all were upon her, compelled the unfortunate girl closely to study her behaviour ; but, above all, those of her father kept her in awe ; for, spite of the dread she had of them, she could not help every moment raising her eyes to his, and, like invisible reins, they regulated every movement and expression of her countenance. After traversing the first court, they entered the second, where the door of the interior cloister was held open, and completely blockaded by nuns. In the first row stood the Abbess, surrounded by the eldest of the sisterhood ; behind them the younger nuns promiscuously arranged, and some on tip-toe ; and, last of all, the lay-sisters mounted on stools. Here and there among them were seen the glancing of certain bright eyes and some little faces peeping out from between the cowls : they were the most active and daring of the pupils, who, creeping in and pushing their way between nun and nun, had succeeded in making an opening where *they* might also see something. Many were the acclamations of this crowd, and many the hands held up in token of welcome and exultation. They reached the door, and Gertrude found herself standing before the Lady Abbess. After the first compliments,

the superior, with an air between cheerfulness and solemnity, asked her what she wanted in that place, where there was no one who would deny her anything.

'I am here . . .' began Gertrude ; but, on the point of pronouncing the words which would almost irrevocably decide her fate, she hesitated a moment, and remained with her eyes fixed on the crowd before her. At this moment she caught the eye of one of her old companions, who looked at her with a mixed air of compassion and malice which seemed to say : ah ! the boaster is caught. This sight, awakening more vividly in her mind her old feelings, restored to her also a little of her former courage ; and she was on the point of framing a reply far different from the one which had been dictated to her, when, raising her eyes to her father's face, almost, as it were, to try her strength, she encountered there such a deep disquietude, such a threatening impatience, that, urged by fear, she continued with great precipitation, as if flying from some terrible object : 'I am here to request permission to take the religious habit in this monastery, where I have been so lovingly educated.' The Abbess quickly answered, that she was very sorry in this instance that the regulations forbade her giving an immediate reply, which must come from the general votes of the sisters, and for which she must obtain permission from her superiors ; that, nevertheless, Gertrude knew well enough the feelings entertained towards her in that place, to foresee what the answer would be ; and that, in the meanwhile, no regulation prevented the Abbess and the sisterhood from manifesting the great satisfaction they felt in hearing her make such a request. There then burst forth a confused murmur of congratulations and acclamations. Presently, large dishes were brought filled with sweetmeats, and were offered first to the bride, and afterwards to her parents. While some of the nuns approached to greet Gertrude, others complimenting her mother, and others the young Prince, the Abbess requested the Prince to repair to the grate of the parlour of conference, where she would wait upon him. She was accompanied by two elders, and on his appearing, 'Signor Prince,' said she ;

‘to obey the regulations . . . to perform an indispensable formality, though in this case . . . nevertheless I must tell you . . . that whenever a young person asks to be admitted to take the veil, . . . the superior, which I am unworthily . . . is obliged to warn the parents . . . that if by any chance . . . they should have constrained the will of their daughter, they are liable to excommunication. You will excuse me . . .’

‘Oh ! certainly, certainly, reverend mother. I admire your exactness ; it is only right . . . But you need not doubt . . .’

‘Oh ! think Signor Prince . . . I only spoke from absolute duty . . . for the rest . . .’

‘Certainly, certainly, Lady Abbess.’

Having exchanged these few words, the two interlocutors reciprocally bowed and departed, as if neither of them felt very willing to prolong the interview, each retiring to his own party, the one outside, the other within the threshold of the cloister. ‘Now then let us go,’ said the Prince : ‘Gertrude will soon have plenty of opportunity of enjoying as much as she pleases the society of these good mothers. For the present, we have put them to enough inconvenience.’ And, making a low bow, he signified his wish to return : the party broke up, exchanged salutations, and departed.

During the drive home Gertrude felt little inclination to speak. Alarmed at the step she had taken, ashamed at her want of spirit, and vexed with others as well as herself, she tried to enumerate the opportunities which still remained of saying no, and languidly and confusedly resolved in her own mind that in this, or that, or the other instance she *would* be more open and courageous. Yet, in the midst of these thoughts, her dread of her father’s frown still held its full sway ; so that once, when, by a stealthy glance at his face, she was fully assured that not a vestige of anger remained, when she even saw that he was perfectly satisfied with her, she felt quite cheered, and experienced a real but transient joy.

On their arrival, a long toilette, dinner, visits, walks, a

conversation and supper followed each other in rapid succession. After supper the Prince introduced another subject—the choice of a godmother. This was the title of the person who, being solicited by the parents, became the guardian and escort of the young novice, in the interval between the request and the admission ; an interval frequently spent in visiting churches, public palaces, conversations, villas, and temples ; in short, everything of note in the city and its environs ; so that the young people, before pronouncing the irrevocable vow, might be fully aware of what they were giving up.

‘We must think of a godmother,’ said the Prince ; ‘for tomorrow the vicar of the nuns will be here for the usual formality of an examination, and shortly afterwards Gertrude will be proposed in council for the acceptance of the nuns.’

In saying this he turned towards the Princess, and she, thinking he intended it as an invitation to her to make some proposal, was beginning : ‘There should be . . .’ But the Prince interrupted her.

‘No, no, Signora Princess ; the godmother should be acceptable above all to the bride ; and though universal custom gives the selection to the parents, yet Gertrude has so much judgment, and such excellent discernment, that she richly deserves to be made an exception.’ And here, turning to Gertrude, with the air of one who was bestowing a singular favour, he continued : ‘Any one of the ladies who were at the conversation this evening possesses all the necessary qualifications for the office of godmother to a person of your family ; and any one of them, I am willing to believe, will think it an honour to be made choice of. Do you choose for yourself.’

Gertrude was fully sensible that to make a choice was but to renew her consent ; yet the proposition was made with so much dignity, that a refusal would have borne the appearance of contempt, and an excuse, of ignorance or fastidiousness. She therefore took this step also, and named a lady who had chiefly taken her fancy that evening ; that is to say, one who had paid her the most attention, who had most applauded her, and who had treated her with those familiar, affection-

ate, and engaging manners which, on the first acquaintance-ship, counterfeited a friendship of long standing. 'An excellent choice,' exclaimed the Prince; who had exactly wished and expected it. Whether by art or chance, it happened just as when a card-player, holding up to view a pack of cards, bids the spectator think of one, and then will tell him which it is, having previously disposed them in such a way that but one of them can be seen. This lady had been so much with Gertrude all the evening, and had so entirely engaged her attention, that it would have required an effort of imagination to think of another. These attentions, however, had not been paid without a motive; the lady had for some time fixed her eyes upon the young Prince as a desirable son-in-law; hence she regarded everything belonging to the family as her own; and therefore it was natural enough that she should interest herself for her dear Gertrude, no less than for her nearest relatives.

On the morrow, Gertrude awoke with the image of the approaching examination before her eyes; and, while she was considering if and how she could seize this most decisive opportunity to draw back, she was summoned by the Prince. 'Courage, my child,' said he: 'until now you have behaved admirably, and it only remains to-day to crown the work. All that has been done hitherto has been done with your consent. If, in this interval, any doubts had arisen in your mind, any misgivings, or youthful regrets, you ought to have expressed them; but at the point* at which we have now arrived, it is no longer the time to play the child. The worthy man who is coming to you this morning will ask you a hundred questions about your election, and whether you go of your own good will, and why, and how, and what not besides. If you tantalise him in your replies, he will keep you under examination I don't know how long. It would be an annoyance and a weariness to you; and it might produce a still more serious effect. After all the public demonstrations that have been made, every little hesitation you may display will risk my honour, and may make people think that I have

taken a momentary fancy of yours for a settled resolution—that I have rushed headlong into the business—that I have . . . what not? In this case, I shall be reduced to the necessity of choosing between two painful alternatives; either to let the world form a derogatory judgment of my conduct—a course which I absolutely cannot take in justice to myself—or to reveal the true motive of your resolution, and . . .’ But here, observing that Gertrude coloured crimson, that her eyes became inflamed, and her face contracted like the petals of a flower in the sultry heat that precedes a storm, he broke off this strain, and continued with a serene face: ‘Come, come, all depends upon yourself—upon your judgment. I know that you are not deficient in it, and that you are not a child, to go spoil a good undertaking just at the conclusion; but I must foresee and provide for all contingencies. Let us say no more about it; only let me feel assured that you will reply with frankness so as not to excite suspicion in the mind of this worthy man. Thus you, also, will be set at liberty the sooner.’ Then, after suggesting a few answers to the probable interrogations that would be put, he entered upon the usual topic of the pleasures and enjoyments prepared for Gertrude at the monastery, and contrived to detain her on this subject when a servant announced the arrival of the examiner. After a hasty repetition of the most important hints, he left his daughter alone with him, according to the usual custom.

The good man came with a slight pre-conceived opinion that Gertrude had a strong desire for a cloistral life, because the Prince had told him so, when he went to request his attendance. It is true that the good priest, who knew well enough that mistrust was one of the most necessary virtues of his office, held as a maxim that he should be very slow in believing such protestations, and should be on his guard against pre-conceptions; but it seldom happens that the positive affirmations of a person of such authority, in whatever matter, do not give a bias to the mind of those who hear them. After the usual salutations: ‘Signorina,’ said he, ‘I am coming

to act the part of the tempter ; I have come to excite doubts where your request expresses certainty, to place difficulties before your eyes, and to assure myself whether you have well considered them. Will you allow me to ask you some questions ?'

'Proceed,' replied Gertrude.

The worthy priest then began to question her in the usual prescribed forms. 'Do you feel in your heart a free, voluntary resolution to become a nun ? Have no threatenings, no flatteries been resorted to ? Has no authority been made use of to persuade you to this step ? Speak without reserve and with perfect sincerity to a man whose duty it is to ascertain your unbiassed will, that he may prevent your being compelled by any exercise of force to take such a course.'

The true answer to such a demand rose up before Gertrude's mind with fearful distinctness. But to make that reply, she must come to an explanation ; she must disclose what she had been threatened with, and relate a story. . . . The unhappy girl shrank back in horror from such an idea, and tried to find some other reply, which would more speedily release her from this unpleasant interview. 'I wish to take the veil,' said she, concealing her agitation—'I wish to take the veil at my own desire, voluntarily.'

'How long have you had this desire ?' again demanded the good priest.

'I have always felt it,' replied Gertrude, rendered after this first step more unscrupulous about speaking the truth.

'But what is the principal motive that induces you to become a nun ?'

The good priest little knew what a terrible chord he was touching ; and Gertrude had to make a great effort not to betray in her countenance the effect which these words produced on her mind, as she replied : 'My motive is to serve God, and to fly the perils of the world.'

'May there not have been some disgust ? Some . . . excuse me . . . some caprice ? There are times when a passing cause may make an impression that seems at the moment sure

to be lasting ; but afterwards, when the cause is removed, and the mind calmed, then . . .’

‘No, no,’ replied Gertrude, precipitately, ‘the reason is exactly what I have told you.’

The vicar, rather to discharge his duty faithfully than because he thought it necessary, persisted in his inquiries ; but Gertrude was resolved to deceive him. Besides the horror she felt at the thought of making him acquainted with her weakness, when he seemed so far from suspecting her of anything of the kind, the poor girl thought that though he could certainly easily prevent her taking the veil, yet that there was the end of his authority over her, or his power of protection. When once he had gone, she would be left alone with the Prince, and of what she would then have to endure in that house the worthy priest could know nothing ; or, even if he did, he could only pity her. The examiner was tired of questioning, before the unfortunate girl of deceiving him ; and, finding her replies invariably consistent, and having no reason to doubt their sincerity, he at last changed his tone, and said all he could to confirm her in her good resolution ; and, after congratulating her, he took his leave. Passing through one of the apartments, he met with the Prince, who appeared to fall in with him accidentally, and congratulated him on the good dispositions his daughter had displayed. The Prince had been waiting in a very wearisome state of suspense, but, on receiving this account, he breathed more freely, and, forgetting his usual gravity, he almost ran to Gertrude, and loaded her with commendations, caresses, and promises, with cordial satisfaction, and a tenderness of manner to a great degree sincere. Such a strange medley is the human heart !

We will not follow Gertrude in her continual round of sights and amusements, nor will we describe, either generally or particularly, the feelings of her mind during this period ; it would be a history of sorrows and fluctuations too monotonous, and too much resembling what we have already related. The beauty of the surrounding seats, the continual variety of objects, and the pleasant excursions in the open air,

rendered the idea of the place where she must shortly alight for the last time more odious to her than ever. Still more painful were the impressions made upon her by the assemblies and amusements of the city. The sight of a bride, in the more obvious and common sense of the word, aroused in her envy and anguish to a degree almost intolerable ; and sometimes the sight of some other individual made her feel as if to hear that title given to herself would be the height of felicity. There were even times when the pomp of palaces, the splendour of ornaments, and the excitement and clamorous festivity of the conversation, so infatuated her, and aroused in her such an ardent desire to lead a gay life, that she resolved to recant, and to suffer anything rather than turn to the cold and death-like shade of the cloister. But all these resolutions vanished into air, on the calmer consideration of the difficulties of such a course, or on merely raising her eyes to the Prince's face. Sometimes, too, the thought that she must for ever abandon these enjoyments made even this little taste of them bitter and wearisome to her ; as the patient, suffering with thirst, eyes with vexation, and almost refuses with contempt, the spoonful of water the physician unwillingly allows him. In the meanwhile, the vicar of the nuns had despatched the necessary attestation, and permission arrived, to hold the conference for the election of Gertrude. The meeting was called ; two-thirds of the secret votes, which were required by the regulations, were given, as was to be expected, and Gertrude was accepted. She herself, wearied with this long struggle, begged for immediate admission into the monastery, and no one came forward to oppose such a request. She was therefore gratified in her wish ; and, after being pompously conducted to the monastery, she assumed the habit. After twelve months of novitiate, full of alternate regret and repentings, the time of public profession arrived ; that is to say, the time when she must either utter a 'no,' more strange, more unexpected, and more disgraceful than ever ; or pronounce a 'yes,' already so often repeated : she pronounced it, and became a nun for ever.

It is one of the peculiar and incommunicable properties of the Christian religion that she can afford guidance and repose to all who, under whatever circumstances, or in whatever exigence, have recourse to her. If there is a remedy for the past, she prescribes it, administers it, and lends light and energy to put it in force, at whatever cost ; if there is none, she teaches how to do that effectually and in reality, which the world prescribes proverbially—make a virtue of necessity. She teaches how to continue with discretion what is thoughtlessly undertaken ; she inclines the mind to cleave steadfastly to what was imposed upon it by authority ; and imparts to a choice which, though rash at the time, is now irrevocable, all the sanctity, all the advisedness, and, let us say it boldly, all the cheerfulness of a lawful calling. Here is a path so constructed that, let a man approach it by what labyrinth or precipice he may, he sets himself, from that moment, to walk in it with security and readiness, and at once begins to draw towards a joyful end. By this means, Gertrude might have proved a holy and contented nun, however she had become one. But, instead of this, the unhappy girl struggled under the yoke, and thus felt it heavier and more galling. An incessant recurrence to her lost liberty, abhorrence of her present condition, and a wearisome clinging to desires which could never be satisfied : these were the principal occupations of her mind. She recalled, over and over again, the bitterness of the past, re-arranged in her mind all the circumstances by which she had reached her present situation, and undid in thought a thousand times what she had done in act. She accused herself of want of spirit, and others of tyranny and perfidy, and pined in secret : she idolised and, at the same time, bewailed her beauty ; deplored a youth destined to struggle in a prolonged martyrdom ; and envied, at times, any woman, in whatever rank, with whatever acquirements, who could freely enjoy these gifts in the world.

The sight of those nuns who had co-operated in bringing her hither was hateful to her : she remembered the arts and contrivance they had made use of, and repaid them with

incivilities, caprices, and even with open reproaches. These they were obliged to bear in silence ; for though the Prince was willing enough to tyrannise over his daughter when he found it necessary to force her into the cloister, yet, having once obtained his purpose, he would not so willingly allow others to assume authority over one of his family ; and any little rumour that might have reached his ears would have been an occasion of their losing his protection, or perhaps, unfortunately, of changing a protector into an enemy. It would seem that she might have felt some kind of leaning towards those other sisters who had not lent a hand in this foul system of intrigue, and who, without having desired her for a companion, loved her as such ; and, always good, busy, and cheerful, showed her, by their example, that here, too, it was possible not only to live, but to be happy : but these, also, were hateful to her, for another reason : their consistent piety and contentment seemed to cast a reproof upon her disquietude and waywardness ; so that she never suffered an opportunity to escape of deriding them behind their backs as bigots, or reviling them as hypocrites. Perhaps she would have been less averse to them, had she known or guessed, that the few black balls found in the urn which decided her acceptance, had been put there by these very sisters.

She sometimes felt a little satisfaction in commanding, in being courted by those within the monastery and visited most flatteringly by those without, in accomplishing some undertaking, in extending her protection, in hearing herself styled the Signora ; but what consolations were these ? The mind which feels their insufficiency would gladly, at times, add to them, and enjoy with them the consolations of religion : yet the one cannot be obtained without renouncing the other ; as a shipwrecked sailor, who would cling to the plank which is to bring him safely to shore, must relinquish his hold on the unsubstantial sea-weed which natural instinct had taught him to grasp.



LUIGI CAPUANA

(1839-1915)



(I)

THE TALISMAN

(Translated by Miss NANCY LAURIER)

EVERYONE remembered him, a thin sickly-looking child, wrapped up in cotton rags and a few faded little garments roughly cobbled together by the inexpert hands of his mother, who went about mending cane chairs, broken saucepans, basins and plates : to do this she carried a basket on her arm full of the necessary wire and putty, a gimlet and a pair of pincers. And while he went to school, his mother went round all the streets and lanes of the village calling out : "Pots to mend !"

And they remembered him too, always with a grey scarf round his neck, working in the carpenter's shop where, a year or two after having left the elementary schools, he had taken up the trade of his father who had died when the boy was only two years old. Four pine-wood tables, two chairs, three planes, an axe, a hammer and, at the back of the shop, standing upright against the walls between the tables, a few pieces of unpolished wood ; and that was all. And the boy worked more than the carpenter, singing from morn till night till he almost deafened the neighbours ; he put up rough and unpolished tables for the poor folk who could not afford the luxury of having them stained, tacked together wooden trestles, sawed and planed small cupboards which often stayed on show for months and months outside the shop in that out-of-the-way street without ever finding anyone to buy them.

And they remembered him still thin, still weakly and still with the woollen scarf round his neck in another little shop

which had rough shelves and few goods upon them : reels of cotton, glue, needles, calico, silk and cotton ribbons, string, wire, brooms, a ream or two of note-paper, liquorice sticks, piles of counters, paints, dyes, starch, a bit of everything in fact. He stood behind the low counter and silently served his clients, for the most part servant girls and small boys who with wholehearted generosity spent a penny on liquorice or counters.

The way in which the little shop had grown remained a mystery ; how more and more goods had accumulated on the shelves now painted blue with red stripes, and on which stood tins of rice, sugar, coffee and many other things which no one would ever have dreamed could have been sold by this boy who spoke so little, perhaps so as not to waste time in gossip, or so as not to waste his breath in arguing about prices. "What is the price of this ?" So much. And this ? So much. And if the customer tried to persuade him that the price was too high, he would go and sit with his eyes fixed on the ground, or else serve someone else. "Well then . . . ?" So much. And he would replace the object on the shelf and let the other stalk out in annoyance, without lifting a finger or saying a word to stop him.

Neither could anyone explain how this half-consumptive lad, who had continued to wear a woollen scarf round his neck for so many years, even in the summer, had grown so much stronger with the growth of his little shop, had acquired colour in his cheeks, a little flesh on his bones, and had taken to wearing such neat and tidy clothes.

They all remembered his past thus in detail almost as if to take revenge for the incredible present. No one considered that this boy who had lost his mother too, and remained orphan just about the time when, to her great joy, he had changed the carpenter's shop into a small draper's store, had lived and was living on very little, steadily accumulating his scanty savings, and using all his ability to place them at as great a profit as possible in prudent speculations which never went wrong.

They saw him go from the village to Noto, or possibly to Syracuse, and come back a few days after with two or three carts piled high with goods of every kind. He never asked for a penny from anyone ; he paid for his goods in ready money. . . . Who was it gave him the cash ?

Their heated imaginations had finally found the explanation. This half-consumptive had had the good fortune to come upon a treasure buried by some unknown person in the old carpenter's shop ; an old tin full of ancient coins of flaming gold which, without saying a word to anyone, he had either exchanged or sold (they did not know precisely which) at Syracuse, some said to an antiquarian, others to an English lord ; and some even went as far as to say that he had been swindled, for the money was worth fifty thousand lire and he had only had a thousand or two for it. No one had ever seen a single coin of this money, but the peasants in his village discussed it as if they had had it in their hands, sorted it and counted it all.

He had heard of the legend which had grown up around his money and had smiled as he thought of the tiny little treasure of five hundred lire which his poor mother had shown him, a few hours before her death.

"I have scraped it together for you, penny by penny ; make good use of it, my son !"

She had pointed to the place with a tremulous, uncertain gesture : a hole high in the wall on the left-hand side of the room. But he, bemazed with sorrow, had thought that she was wandering in her mind ; and only two weeks after the poor old woman's death did he have the idea of looking inside the hole. He had had to place the chair on a table before he could reach to put in his hand, and at first he had pulled out only a handful of tow. He was just going to climb down, disappointed, when he noticed that he had moved a stone at the back of the hole while he was feeling the sides of it. He pulled it away, and searched still further inside . . . His mother had spoken the truth ! Five hundred lire—a fortune as it seemed to him—in silver coins wrapped in a cotton

handkerchief with red flowers on a yellow ground, and tied together by the corners.

He had sobbed all night, deeply touched by the unexpected legacy which certainly represented the scanty price paid for how many chairs and saucepans and basins and dishes which she had mended, and besides a long series of privations and sacrifices which the poor woman had suffered, thinking always only of the future of her son.

Blessed indeed had proved those five hundred lire. They had rapidly multiplied and the cotton handkerchief with its red flowers on a yellow ground, now almost a talisman, lay in a little glass box under the picture of the Madonna of all Virtues which was placed high up on the middle shelf.

If he had told the story, no one would have believed him ; no one would have envied him that reality as they envied him that fantastic tin piled high with ancient golden coins. They even envied him his health, as if he stole something from others by making a success of his own affairs. But he laughed at them all ; he had the handkerchief which brought him good luck. And as he opened the shop in the morning and shut it up at night, he always said a prayer, first to the handkerchief, that is to his mother, and then to the Madonna of all Virtues, who would forgive him this preference since she too had been a mother.

Until then he had continued to live in the two little rooms of the old house where his mother had died. Her room, however, could not store all the goods which he afterwards, bit by bit, had carried for him to the shop. He was forced to seek another house and instead of renting he had bought it, for a small sum, since—as the envious mumbled—good luck always came his way. And not satisfied with doing up the front of the house, he had added another storey with balconies instead of windows and a large terrace on the roof.

“Now that he has caught building fever you’ll see what a cropper he will fall. When money falls from the skies, the devil takes it away as quickly as it has come !”

He took no notice of them, but very gradually widened the

circle of his speculations, buying up the almond crop in anticipation ; and up there, on the terrace, a dozen women broke the shells and sorted out the kernels which were immediately sent in sacks by cartloads to Catania or Messina, and returned to him transformed into fine little heaps of golden coins, or into notes of a hundred, five hundred or even a thousand lire, in spite of those who prophesied that he had "bitten off more than he could chew."

It was, in fact, in connection with a small freight of almonds, that he had seen again after so many years a peasant who had been an old friend of his father and had gone to live in a small neighbouring village.

He had stopped in front of the shop, spelling out the name above the door,

GIOVANNI LIARDO

Draper, etc.

and he had gone in, pleased at the thought of knowing the son of his deceased friend and of seeing him thus in comfortable circumstances. The contract for the almonds had been settled in a moment. And before he went away, the old man had asked him :

"Are you married ?"

"I have other fish to fry !" had answered Giovanni.

"But then who do you work for ?" the old man rejoined "For whom do you spend your energy ? You ought to have someone here and in the house with the same interests as you, instead of a maid or a young shop assistant who . . . Well, I don't want to say anything against anybody, but you can't have eyes everywhere, and . . . opportunity makes the thief."

It was almost as though he had said, "Put that in your pipe and smoke it ! Who are you working for ? For whom are you spending your energy ? . . . You can't have eyes everywhere ?"

And he thought too of that other person "with the same interests," but with instinctive diffidence.

His childhood had been a sad one ; sad, too, had been his

youth until a year or two ago. He felt the weight of this sorrow on his shoulders, not as a now far-off memory, but as something which had penetrated into his very blood and flesh and bones and which not only prevented him from feeling any enjoyment in his changed circumstances, but also made him shy, embarrassed and too humble in the presence of certain people.

And so, despite the usual notice, "Credit given to-morrow, but not to-day," he had never been able to say "no" to Mazza, the squire, who, having ruined himself at cards, still wished to live ostentatiously, as though his creditors had not already seized upon his investments and were not on the point of seizing on the house as well, or the palace, as he was pleased to call it.

Squire Mazza, with his wrinkled face, his re-tinted moustache and few remaining hairs, his light coloured suits which he wore even in winter, so as to have a youthful appearance, would come into the shop with the air of a benevolent patron :

"Let me see, let me see—there should be . . . ah yes, there it is, yes . . . that one . . . no, the other ! . . . Well done ! Here we have to pay fixed prices, "pri fi," as they say in Paris . . . Now, let me see how much I am spending . . . Ah yes—send it all to the palace, carefully packed up.—We shall meet again. But you know, a shop like this really wouldn't be out of place in a big town ! Well done. Well done, keep it up !"

And Giovanni never dared to answer, "Let us meet here and now to discuss the price, that would be much better."

He felt that by his benevolent attitude Squire Mazza intended to convey the words—

"Remember : I have known you since you were a child. Your mother has recaned my chairs and mended my broken saucepans and cracked basins. Though now you have a little money, it is of no importance whatever. Twenty years ago when you went to school, the few rags you wore didn't prevent your shivering with cold and often you had only dry

bread for your mid-day meal. . . . And so . . . if I choose to buy from you . . . even at credit . . . you must esteem it an honour."

Perhaps Squire Mazza did not think anything of all this ; Giovanni thought it, however, and it was just as if the other had said it out to his face. And however much the old peasant's advice sounded in his ears, and however much every evening before going to sleep he mentally reviewed all the marriageable girls whom he knew by sight and also those whom he did not, he could not make up his mind to take steps in that direction because of that feeling of shyness, embarrassment and excessive humility which was the mark left on him, perhaps for all his life, by the past.

Another, in his place, would have become proud. Instead of "young Liardo," he would have had himself called "Mister Liardo," if only to annoy that half-starved "gentry" who, when speaking of him, always said "the potmender's son," as though he had neither Christian nor surname. He, on the contrary, felt honoured by a title which to others seemed shameful.

If his mother had still been alive, at his house or in the shop, she would not have been in the least ashamed of having mended chairs and saucepans. And now that he had risen as high as he had, only by her help, by virtue, as he was deeply convinced, of that cotton handkerchief with its red flowers and yellow ground which lay in the glass box on the top shelf under the picture of the Madonna of all Virtues, he would have felt as if he were despising and renouncing his mother by adding a "mister" to the name which had been given him at the font, as someone advised from time to time ; but . . . put no trust in advice not asked for !

All of a sudden, one day, it was announced that Giovanni Liardo was to marry the only daughter of Parlato, the tailor. And a month afterwards the beautiful girl with her thick, black curling hair, sparkling black eyes, her bright, fresh complexion, a smile of satisfaction on her full, carmine lips, her hands covered with rings and dressed like a fine lady (for

Liardo had wished to do the thing well and without stint) sat in state behind the counter, answered the customers' greetings and helped her husband, taking down the things which he silently pointed out to her, eager to learn the prices, the weight, the quality of the goods, and already quick to serve those who came to buy simple objects of everyday use.

The effect of a woman in the shop could soon be seen in the general tidiness and especially in the absence of a variety of objects which had always been kept lying about there before. Her continual tidying, however, worried Giovanni, who felt more at home in the usual confusion.

"Let be, Marina ; in the end I shan't be able to find anything !"

"One must think of appearances. The goods make no show at all, all thrown about like this in the drawers, and shelves, and on the floor."

And Marina went on banging things about, dusting and placing them to the best advantage. In a few weeks the shop was a different place ; but when some of the customers congratulated him or his wife, Giovanni experienced a certain sadness at the change which had taken place, a slight mental depression because of the new will which dominated both himself and his belongings, with a sweet authority, it is true, but still with an authority against which his timidity forbade him to protest.

They had not married for love. On his part there had been a little material calculation, more than a little on the part of the tailor and his daughter. But after six months' intimacy he had almost forgotten why he had preferred Marina to other girls who, if not as beautiful as she, certainly had a larger dowry. Then he had had the idea of extending his business to materials for ladies, muslins, woollen stuffs, handkerchiefs, shawls, and also cotton and woollen materials for men. The tailor could have helped a great deal in selling these things. But now Giovanni was not even thinking of asking him. As it was her father often came and meddled with what concerned the shop, giving advice and suggesting novelties, as if

those were not enough which his daughter thought out and put into practice every day.

"What are you looking at?"

"I am looking at the picture of the Madonna with that horrid little frame . . ."

"She had protected me like that up to now, and no doubt she will continue to protect us."

"And the little box under the picture?"

"Oh that, it's nothing. There's no need to move anything up there. The Madonna is high up, and isn't in anybody's way."

He had answered rather abruptly, not so much because of the Madonna as because of the little box with the miraculous handkerchief. He was convinced that all his good luck came from its presence up there; he was still more convinced that all its power would be gone if he ever let out the secret of how he had found it, and what it had contained. It was like that with lucky numbers found in dreams. If once they were confided to friends or relatives good-bye to any hope of their ever coming to the top. The good God gives fortune to one but does not wish it to be given to another. He had not made him dream merely three or four numbers, but had granted him a better thing. And every morning, as he came into the shop, Giovanni's first action was always to look up and see whether the handkerchief was still in its place. The anxiety which he felt every time he put the key in the lock and opened the door, as though he were about to have the misfortune of finding it gone from the little glass box; and the sigh of satisfaction which he breathed every time he caught sight of it up there confirmed him in the conviction that he was right in having attributed to it all his good fortune. That anxiety and that sigh of satisfaction were to him a continual and lively warning. Marina, however, piqued by the cutting tone of his reply, had insisted:

"But what is the yellow rag inside, with the red flowers?"

"Nothing; just to hide the emptiness of the box."

"Why ever are you so annoyed?"

"Because of you, Marina, for changing everything about . . . I am accustomed to things in a certain way, and that Madonna and that box have been up there for years, and I don't want them touched. Do you understand?"

She had sat herself down on the chair in the corner, with a frown on her face, struck by the "I want" which had passed her husband's lips for the first time, though spoken in gentle tones. She was sulky until the evening, and refused to speak a word either on the way home or at supper. He was mortified to see her behave thus. The superstition which made him believe that the handkerchief would lose its power if he revealed its history prevented him from saying, "Silly child! What do you suspect me of? It's my mother's handkerchief."

The resolve that he had taken to remain silent at all costs kept him awake all night. She was not asleep either. He could feel her turning over and over beside him, sighing, as if a great rift had come between them. And he lay motionless on his side fearing to provoke a question which he perhaps would not be able to resist.

As his wife started at the sound of the neighbouring church clock which was dolefully tolling out midnight he could contain himself no longer :

"What's the matter? Aren't you well?"

Hearing her sob, he anxiously repeated the question. Marina went on sobbing, her face to the wall. It seemed as if she wanted to restrain, to hold back the sobs that they might not be noticed, but could not succeed.

"But what's the matter . . . Tell me."

"What does it matter to you?" she gasped out.

"What do you mean? What does it matter to me?"

"You wouldn't even satisfy me in that one little thing?"

"Which?"

"Seeing what was in the glass box."

"Nothing. A cotton handkerchief. An old rag."

At the quick start which he felt her give he quickly corrected his involuntary half revelation.

"And is it so very dear to you, that old rag?"

"Rag ! . . . I said that meaning that it's a cheap handkerchief."

"Then why don't you want it touched ? Who did the handkerchief belong to ?"

"No one. I had several in the shop—the first ones that I used to sell at less than cost price to attract customers. The last, that one, was left over . . . I needed something to hide the emptiness of the box . . . I had it under my hand, and put it there : and there it has remained. I expect by now it's moth-eaten."

"There you see ? You don't know how to get the words out. . . You aren't speaking the truth. . . You're much too fond of that handkerchief. Who gave it you ? . . . A lover ?"

"Oh !"

"Someone who means a lot to you anyway, since you do not want," she laid stress on the word "want," "anyone to touch it."

"I ? A lover ?"

"Don't pretend to laugh !"

"But I'm really laughing . . . Come, don't let's speak of it any more."

"Well really ! If you think that now I can come quietly to the shop and hold a candle to that handkerchief put in adoration under the Madonna, you're very much mistaken ! Out the handkerchief goes . . . or I go !"

"Marina . . . Please ! Don't let us speak of it any more !"

"Is it so much to ask of you then, just to tell me the truth : that hateful handkerchief. . . I should like to tear it into shreds and burn it, so that the very shadow is gone. One would think it was your very dearest possession !"

He nearly answered : "Yes it is. Dearer than you, or anyone, or anything." But he had the strength to keep back the words. Marina's obstinacy was certainly the effect of the devil who was tempting her in order to ruin him and bring him to perdition. The devil knew very well, since he knows all there is to know, that Giovanni's good fortune was firmly

bound up with that of the handkerchief placed under the protection of the Madonna, and was trying to use Marina as he had used Eve with Adam in the Garden of Eden, to induce him to betray his secret. This time, however, the devil had made a mistake !

He stayed crouched in his corner until he saw the first daylight appear through the cracks of the shutters ; then without saying a word he dressed and went down to the kitchen to light the fire, made the coffee, and carried a cup to his wife, silently placing it on the bed-table, while he mentally repeated to himself : "This time, the devil has made a mistake!" He then took the keys of the shop and went out of the house. Never before had he felt such a lively anxiety to see the handkerchief up there in the little box ; never before had he heaved such a deep sigh of relief when he caught sight of it in its usual place !

"Where is Marina ?"

"At home."

"Is she ill ?"

"Nerves, I should think."

"What a way to say it ! . Have you quarrelled ? What about ?"

"Over nothing."

"You're a couple of children. . . What about ?"

The father-in-law insisted, but for all answer Giovanni shrugged his shoulders in annoyance.

The life which his wife had forced upon him during the last week was not a pleasant one. He had to stay there behind the counter from morning till night without being able to go away from the shop a minute, even to settle a contract for almonds. He would not trust any go-betweens ; he always wanted to see everything himself ; seeing and touching with his own hands had always been his way, and it had acted very well. . . And now . . .

"What about ? What about ? Go and ask her yourself ! When some people get a thing into their heads . . ."

"My daughter isn't like that !"

"You're putting me in the wrong before you know anything about it."

"It's up to the man to be careful. . . Anyway, tell me what it's all about."

Giovanni briefly explained.

"That handkerchief has been there for years, ever since I put it there on the shelf. What harm is it doing her? And now she makes out she's jealous!"

"Well, take it and throw it away, then!"

Giovanni gave him such a look that his father-in-law narrowed his eyes the better to look him in the face.

"Marina is perfectly right to be suspicious and jealous," he said after a pause, "Why are you so obstinate in keeping it up there? If it were a holy relic, one might understand it!"

"Whim, eccentricity, idiocy, call it what you will. But no one, no one must touch it!"

He grew angry as if someone were laying a trap for him, as if he had discovered the threads of a plot against him to seize on the prosperity which he had acquired with so much work, such efforts, such sacrifices and above all with such honesty. He had never done harm to anyone, yet he knew that there were many envious folk, enemies who would have been only too glad if his business had eventually gone to pieces. They were envious because, thanks to the Madonna and his mother's handkerchief, he had never made the slightest mistake in his speculations. They said of him: "If he were to put water in a lamp instead of oil, the water would burn just as well." And it was almost true! But they never added that he did not swindle on his weights and measures as they all did, or deceive his customers about the quality of the goods! He had never taken any notice of what others said to discredit him and he never would. But still to see the envy and danger coming from his wife and his father-in-law who put his daughter in the right, was enough to rouse anyone. It wasn't as if it were just any handkerchief. . . But it had belonged to his mother, it brought him luck; it would be infamous to tear it up, to throw it away or to burn it and scatter the ashes, just

to give a stupid satisfaction to his wife ! He would have felt as if he were disinterring his poor dead mother and desecrating her bones. And the more his father-in-law and wife were determined that the handkerchief was a love-token—as if he had ever had time to think of love—the more obstinate and immoveable he became on this point. Only thus could he get what he wanted !

And indeed he flattered himself that he had got what he wanted.

Two days after, Marina re-appeared in the shop accompanied by her father. She came in, greeted him, took off her shawl and began serving the customers who were waiting, as if nothing had happened. Giovanni did not move quickly ; he seemed to ponder over everything as though he were afraid of making a mistake. Marina, on the other hand, served the customers in a moment ; took the money and gave the change with a smile, a kindly word or a laughing gesture ; and the customers went away without realising that the kind word, the smile or the gesture had cost them grams or centimetres less according to the goods. Giovanni had noticed it once and had reproved her.

“No, it’s not right. One must be conscientious. . .”

“The little less I give them, compensates for the little more they get from you. It makes no difference to them ; but a little more or a little less put together makes a profit for us.”

At that time Giovanni felt remorseful for having laughed at his wife’s words, for she had tapped his shoulder caressingly, repeating the words “makes profit” as if to impress them on his mind.

Meanwhile Marina avoided even looking up at the back shelf ; at home she chattered and laughed as usual ; and never, never did she make even a distant allusion to what had passed between them a few weeks before.

At first Giovanni had watched her doubtfully, put on his guard by the sudden reconciliation. Then he thought that his father-in-law must have given her a lecture, and put his suspicions from him.

That morning they had come to the shop together ; and Giovanni as he opened the door had felt more anxious than usual to make sure that the handkerchief was in its place, and more than usually relieved to see it there. Oddly enough, however, he had still felt a tiny bit troubled, somehow restless and anxious, so that he nearly decided to give up the idea of buying up a large consignment of almonds. The agent, however, had insisted :

“It’s an opportunity not to be missed, Master Giovanni !”

So he had been to see the goods in the storerooms of the old Signora Campanazzo, not for nothing nick-named the Chatterbox, for she chattered like a rook and once she had begun nothing could stop her.

Two or three times Giovanni had made as if to go ; the business had already been settled, and the money handed over by the agent ; but the “Chatterbox” had wished to confide to him all her family troubles ; a brother who gambled ; a sister-in-law who would do nothing to help ; two nephews, the one more headstrong than the other ! Without her the house would be all to pieces. She did what she could. She ought to have worn the breeches, but . . . !”

“Half past two !” exclaimed Giovanni looking at the clock, and walking more quickly so as to arrive sooner at the shop.

“Half past two, maybe ; but you’ll have at the very least three hundred lire profit !”

Giovanni nodded his head at the words. Every time he clinched a bargain he felt a thrill of glad presentiment of assured future success. To-day, however, he returned to the shop still under the influence of that subtle sense of anxiety and restlessness and had felt no thrill of excitement at the back of his mind.

The shop was overflowing with customers. It seemed as if they had deliberately tried to be there when he was away.

“I thought you were never coming back !” said Marina.

He did not answer but began to serve those customers who seemed to be in the greatest hurry.

“Be careful. The Madonna’s going to fall.”

At the words and gesture of the child, Giovanni wheeled round so quickly that he knocked into Marina who was busy weighing out sugar. Hardly had he looked up when he gave a great cry which was followed by an answering shriek from Marina who felt herself seized on from behind by two convulsive hands which tried to suffocate her. The women and children in the shop began to scream, and a young workman leaped over the counter to rescue the wife from her husband's clutches.

Pale-faced, wide-eyed, with drops of cold sweat on his forehead, and his lips and tongue so dry that he could not speak a word, Giovanni had sunk on to a chair covering his head with his hands as if he were afraid that the roof of the shop were about to fall in upon them. Then he sprang up, hands clenched, towards the sobbing Marina who stood upright in a corner between two sympathetic women hardly heeding the workman who was trying to calm her.

"The handkerchief! The handkerchief!" he stammered, "What have you done with it?"

"Master Giovanni! How unlike your usual self you are. I should never have thought it of you. . . All this for a mere handkerchief!"

"You wicked woman! You don't know what disaster you've brought upon us! Where have you put it?" he stormed on, fists clenched and staring eyes.

"Tell him where you have hidden it! Don't make him any angrier," said the young man turning to Marina, unable to understand how such strife should have arisen over a mere handkerchief.

"The handkerchief? I've torn it to shreds!" answered Marina defiantly, and drying her eyes, she stopped crying.

For two days the shop remained shut as if for a death. Giovanni, sitting in a dark corner of the little room next to the kitchen, had no more strength left to cry and lament. He sorrowed, shaking his head and wringing his hands, just as if he had only then lost his mother.

Carlo Parlato, the father-in-law, came and went from his

daughter's room. Remorseful for what she had done, she sent him to beg her husband to forgive her ; she did not dare to throw herself at his feet, lest she should anger him still more.

"After all, what is done, is done. It can't be helped now. It's a little your own fault too, you must admit. If you have only given a hint ! . . . Worse than an old woman ! Of course I understand that the handkerchief belonged to your mother. But fancy believing that all your good fortune is bound up in that little square of printed cotton ! Yes, I understand. A son's love. . . Still your mother in Paradise knows how it happened. You'll see she'll protect you just the same."

"You will see, you mean, everyone will see the ruin that will come upon us !" answered Giovanni, and would accept no comfort.

Meanwhile the shop could not be kept closed.

The morning that he went to open it, accompanied by his father-in-law, at the sight of the Madonna hanging up there above the shelf, he broke into loud sobs as if his very heart would break.

By the irony of fate who should be the first customer that morning but Squire Mazza, even more dressed up and brightly coloured than ever. He too had heard the story of the handkerchief ; for the last two days the whole village had talked of nothing else.

"So it's really true ? Well, my good friend, I very nearly agree with you. I am a bit superstitious myself—like all card-players. Ah yes, my dear Parlato ! You are being the ministering angel. . . But certain things cannot be explained ; there's an influence—for good, or for evil, it certainly exists ! I should rather think it does ! . . . Coffee and sugar, my last remaining vice ! . . . A quarter of a pound of coffee ; half a pound of sugar, that will last me for a month. I will send for them myself. We'll put it all on the bill. Besides, you know, it all depends on how you take it—you must react against the evil influence—and that strongly. As far as that is concerned, my dear Parlato, I quite agree with you. That's it, react

against it. . . Make one big parcel of the two little ones and tie it up with string : there we are ! I have to keep the sugar under lock and key at home ; my old servant has such a sweet tooth. Now understand, you must react against it. We shall soon meet again."

"There are out first gains !" exclaimed Giovanni sadly.

It was useless to comfort him with fine words ; he felt as if his body, and worse still, his mind too, had been crippled. He had forgiven his wife who now stood humbly and submissively beside him, and did not dare touch or move anything, as if the contact of her hands could bring greater harm to the goods ; but both seemed under the oppression of a nightmare, the expectancy of some fatal happening against which neither human courage nor human power could avail.

The first Monday in every month, Marina without telling her husband, fasted, in expiation, had Mass celebrated for the dead woman's soul and gave alms to the poor.

It was clear, however, that the dead were not to be placated. During the first month the almonds sent to Catania had been an utter failure. They lay unsold in the agent's shop, were becoming dry and fast losing their weight and quality.

Marina had begun to cry when she heard the news as if she had been the cause of the drop in price.

"It's nothing," said her husband. "It's always like that in trade ; you gain on one thing and lose on another ; it always gets compensated for."

But from the tone of his voice it was easy to understand that he himself was far from convinced. He had lost faith in himself ; he no longer felt a loving hand urging him onward or holding him back when he was about to venture on a good or a bad undertaking.

"It's nothing, nothing at all !"

And it was as if he had added "compared with what will come after."

Meanwhile he did not wish the envious, those who, as he said, would have been glad to see him begging his living in the streets, to have the satisfaction of seeing him sorrowful and

downcast. As his good cheer did not come from the heart, the words which he wished to sound cheerful took on a strange sadness without his knowing it.

Marina lifted her eyes every time and looked at him.

"Are you still angry with me?"

"I'm not angry with anyone, with you or with myself! If I'm angry with anyone . . ."

"With whom then?"

"With my star."

"I'm your unlucky star."

He did not speak of it again, seeing that every time he mentioned his unlucky star, Marina's eyes filled with tears.

Gradually there even crept into his heart a gentle tenderness for her, almost as if he had really begun to love her; he wished to keep all his sadness shut up within himself. He forced himself to believe, in fact, that the idea of all his good fortune having disappeared at the same time as the handkerchief might well be an old woman's superstition as his father-in-law had said. True, business was not as prosperous as usual, but it was his fault, he was letting things slide; he was not fighting against the competition of the other two drapers who had come the year before and who were making every possible effort to steal his customers. React against it! That was the thing. Squire Mazza who never paid, and turned up from time to time with his famous "I'll see you again soon," was right. React against it. But a little while after he was as discouraged as before. He no longer dared to touch the capital which he kept in the safe: it would serve for any possible disaster. Goods bought at long-standing credit because he was generally trusted did not prosper as they once had done. He had allowed himself to be coaxed into buying goods of inferior quality at a lower price, which he wanted to sell as usual, as though his customers would not notice the difference.

And so customers became fewer and fewer, especially the "gentry," who found it more convenient to buy at credit from the other two drapers than to pay cash down to the "pot-mender's son," as he had always remained to them.

He had not, therefore, a very good opinion of the "gentry," partly perhaps because he resented the name they gave him, partly because with them he could not make use of a complaint lodged against them with the magistrate or town-clerk ; one had to have more consideration for them than for the common folk for whom the mere threat of lodging a complaint was enough.

And he had undertaken to sell at credit, writing his income and expenditure in an account book ; more expenditure than income, it is true ; but that was nothing . . . the customers flowed back.

"Are you pleased, Master Giovanni ?" they would say to him, "The mistress will soon give you a fine child."

He would smile and turn to look at his wife who, notwithstanding her advanced condition, wished to help in the shop, although she was not able to tire herself very much, and had to spend the day sitting by the door as there was not enough air behind the counter. She sat there, proud of her own maternity which both husband and wife interpreted as an act of grace and pardon from the dead mother, and a good omen for the future.

At noon they both had something to eat at the back of the shop for at that time customers were few. That day they had hardly sat down, and he had just begun to peel a hard-boiled egg, when two boys from the village called to him :

"Master Giovanni ! Master Giovanni !"

They had run all the way to tell him :

"You haven't shut the door of the house!"

He started up, seized his hat and ran out, saying to his wife :
"I shall be back in a moment."

And after the theft, Marina's miscarriage.

No more was ever heard of the seven thousand lire, it was as if they had simply evaporated from the cupboard drawer. A small boy had seen a tall, bearded man dressed in black with his hat pulled over his eyes, come out of the house : but that was all he could say. Suspicion had fallen on someone, but the man had justified himself, spreading about both words and

money, and starting a rumour that he had won a ballot. He was tall, bearded and dressed in black . . . But where were the proofs ?

Seven thousand lire ! All the wealth acquired with such difficulty in thirty years ! Giovanni felt as if he were going mad, but meanwhile he had to feign cheerfulness for the sake of Marina, who, on hearing of the theft, had felt as if something had given way in her spine and lay for six days between life and death. He felt as if he were going mad as he thought of future losses, of creditors whom he could, with difficulty pay only enough to satisfy them for the time being. And then they wanted to convince him that the tale of his mother's handkerchief was an old woman's superstition. How could he not believe that his good fortune did consist in possessing the handkerchief, when after . . . when from then onwards everything had steadily gone from bad to worse ?

He was not angry with the unhappy Marina who continually wept and lamented, propped up against a pile of pillows, pale faced, with sunken eyes and white lips, delirious and tormented with a burning thirst. Poor thing ! She had been tempted by the devil, like Eve. Then he would throw off his momentary weakness. . .

"Childish superstition ! Childish superstition !"

But sometimes, haunted by the thought of unavoidable bankruptcy, he was driven even to blasphemy :

"Oh mother, mother, how cruel you have been !"

(II)

THE "PENSION" GARACCI

(Translated by Miss NANCY LAURIER)

ON the first floor of Duke Bompensiero's old palace lived the widow Garacci who kept a pension there. From without, the palace still maintained a certain architectural dignity, with

its great balconies and rusty railings, its faded window shutters and its gargoyles, chipped here and there, representing fantastic animals in curiously strained attitudes, as though they were carrying immensely heavy weights. But hardly across the threshold one realised from the ill-kept condition of the staircase how neglected must be the building which had fallen into the hands of several of the Duke's creditors. As they had not been able to agree as to how to share it between them, they paid an agent for the sole purpose of collecting the rents without ever doing even the most necessary repairs.

On an outside wall of the porter's little hole of a room had hung for years a notice, with the words "For Sale," written in big letters, so as to catch the attention of the passers-by. The porter, however, who dozed all day long hunched up in a rickety chair had never seen anyone come in who showed the slightest wish to visit the palace with the intention of buying it. And so the place took on an appearance of greater and greater melancholy; here, only unfortunate people took refuge there in order to hide a modest existence in these great rooms disfigured by partitions.

The ground floor, divided into three flats, was kept by a tailor whose customers were few and by the families of a barber and a hatter, whose shops were on either side of the front door. The barber's "Egyptian Saloon" could not justify its pretentious name; and the dozen or so ragged hats, washed, cleaned and left to dry on their shapes in the sun, showed only too plainly to what straits the other's trade was reduced.

On the first floor, the "pension" Garacci without a notice or anything else to indicate its existence kept the hall door open night and day for the convenience of lodgers who were for the most part clerks, professors, lawyers, magistrates and commercial travellers. The three inner doors, one opposite and one on each side, should always have remained closed in deference to the notice placed next to the bell-rope which asked that precaution of careless guests.

There must have been a large proportion of careless guests,

for every time I went to see my old professor of theoretical philosophy in the "dug-out" as he philosophically called it which the Signora Garacci had appointed to him, at the end of a dark and narrow passage encumbered with trunks and broken furniture, I found the door half open, and I was often able to penetrate to the far end, without meeting the slovenly maid of all work, who was supposed to keep the rooms clean.

"Come in !"

I used to hesitate before penetrating into the intense untidiness of that fearsome "dug-out," heaped with books, periodicals, pamphlets and newspapers piled in a confused mass on the desk, the chairs, the floor and sometimes even on the bed, when the professor had had to consult one of those volumes of papers which were so difficult to find amongst the incredible confusion in which everything was kept.

I had once said to him :

"If you like, I'll tidy them myself. You should make the landlady give you a cupboard and a book-case."

"Where should I put it ?" he answered. "There is hardly room to turn round. Find another room somewhere else ? No, no ! I cannot abide changes. Besides I shouldn't be a philosopher if I didn't take things as they came. Other boarding-houses would be worse still, my boy, this place is bad, and the food is worse, but at least the people are decent. On this side there is a lawyer ; on the other an accountant from the custom house, who snores like a bear at night and prevents my sleeping ; during the day, however, he does not disturb me in the least. The lawyer gets up at eight o'clock, makes a great deal of noise washing, and sings in a tenor voice, or a baritone for all I know, while he is dressing ; he goes out at half-past nine and only comes home in the evening. The clerk from the customs comes in after midnight. True that before going to bed he blows his nose with trombone-like variations ten or twenty times running ; true that the moment he gets into bed he begins to snore, but I have got accustomed to it. And those multitudinous nose-blowings which come with such regularity positively amuse me ; I wait for them, I

count them and jot down the number in my note-book so as to take statistics. One thousand eight hundred and sixty-nine in three months ! There's a philosophical occupation for you. A philosopher must be interested in everything, my boy. No human detail whether physical or moral is to be despised. As a matter of fact those methodical nose-blowings have prompted me to study the psychology of certain habits. I have already written two chapters on the subject."

"All the same, this mass of books gives the maid an excuse for cleaning in a very summary fashion."

"She makes the bed, empties the water in the basin and sweeps the floor. . . . What more do I want ? She has orders not to move anything so as not to spoil my untidiness—which is no such thing for me. I know that the room is bare, without curtains, pictures or ornaments, but that, my boy, is just what a philosopher needs. External things distract the attention and hinder thought. That is why, when I am working, I surround myself with a great cloud of smoke from my pipe, which hides even the walls and gives me an impression of infinite space. I have always lived like this, since I was a child in similar dug-outs, often even more gloomy than this one, without either air or light. And here I am, sixty-six years old, strong, healthy with few needs and no peculiarities : more spiritualised than you, my boy, though you may not believe it, partly from necessity, partly from deliberate choice. Philosophy is a magnificent eliminator where certain civil requirements are concerned ; it eliminates woman, the great enemy. You can't understand. You studied philosophy as you would have studied theology or medicine or literature, solely to take a good degree, and obtain a professorship. I don't blame you, or say that you were wrong to do so. The choice you made honours your intelligence ; you are one of my best disciples, if not my only one ; I am not flattering you. But though philosophy has entered a little into your brain, it certainly has not yet taken hold of you altogether. You can do many other things which have little or nothing to do with philosophy, I can't ; I can only rave, as scoffers say, and

wallow in abstractions. I could affirm, that, for me, the world was non-existent, so few are the needs which make me aware of its reality. I myself non-existent in the eyes of the world? What does it matter to me! . . . And so what is the good of attacking practical philosophy. Practical philosophy! As if philosophy could be anything else! As if it weren't the most practical thing in the world! As if . . ."

I went to see him on purpose to enjoy these improvisations which were often more useful than his lectures at the University given to three, four or five students, not always the same ones, who put him in a bad temper, more for lacking in respect towards knowledge than for wounding his vanity as a professor.

But one fine day, having made my way down the passage, I knocked at the door of the "hole" and a thick surly voice shouted :

"Who is there?"

"It is I, professor."

"You've made a mistake, the professor has moved ; he is in number nine."

My amazement was great. I knew that number nine was the best room in the house. I turned back and knocked at the door and the professor answered with his usual "Come in!"

Seeing that I had stopped on the threshold as if I could not believe my eyes, he came to meet me with a kindly smile.

"It was the wish of the Signora Garacci, my boy, and of her daughter too. The moment this room was empty, they seized on my books, my papers, my pipe, laughing all the time they carried away armfuls of books, periodicals and manuscripts. The daughter would have no one to help her even to put everything in its place. For a day or two, my boy, I couldn't feel at home in all this tidiness and cleanliness. I felt as if I could neither think nor concentrate—the smoke from my pipe lost itself in the air, I could not succeed in surrounding myself and having the illusion of infinite space. And still . . . to tell the truth. . . . But one must take life as it comes ; I shall get used to the bright light and the tidiness in time ; I have

got used to so many other things ! I am a very adaptable individual, in the end, I can adapt myself to the most revolting circumstances. And now it is a question of pleasing, agreeable circumstances. There is one serious defect in all this. . . . Down there in my "dug-out" I never saw anyone except the maid, for half an hour, when she came to do the room. But here, my proximity with the rooms which belong to the landlady and her daughter, bring on me an assiduous and benevolent watchfulness which I occasionally find annoying . . ."

"Mere trifles," I answered, "it is much better in here."

Several times I came upon the Garacci mother and daughter installed on the sofa in the professor's room talking confidentially ; or else the mother alone with something in her hand which had given her the excuse of "disturbing the professor" as she called it ; or else the daughter by herself sorting the papers on the desk and cleaning the faded green carpet all stained with sealing-wax by the professor "who lives among the clouds, happy man !"

I used to say to him jestingly, "Have a care, professor !"

And he would shrug his shoulders, blink his eyes and shake his head.

"Have a care, professor ! The 'great enemy' has made her way inside the fort !"

I had said so the morning before that terrible day. . . . Poor old man, poor professor of philosophy, and what is more, poor philosopher, which means something very different !

I learnt afterwards that the Signora Garacci had repeated the trick twice and had been wonderfully successful both times. I learnt that the lodgers called it "the condemned cell." He who went in a bachelor rarely came out other than a married man while the widow Garacci still had a daughter to marry off ; the danger for anyone getting on in years was almost inevitable. And last of all to fall into the trap was the poor old professor !

The "pension" was all upside down. There were groups of strangers round the porter who was telling the story to the inquisitive with additional comments calculated to raise a

laugh. I went in ; on the stairs and the landings stood a group of lodgers that I knew by sight also laughing and arguing heatedly. The door of number nine was open, the room full of officials and police, and among them, sitting in a corner, looking rather bewildered, was the professor. Facing him, unkempt, still in a morning wrap and with a grey shawl round her shoulders, stood the widow Garacci ; and behind her, crying and hiding her face in her hands—the daughter.

When I looked in at the door between the heads of two policemen, an inspector was writing out a document which he handed to the professor so that he might “read its contents and sign it,” the professor signed without having read it, then the inspector got up, folded the piece of paper, put it in his pocket and said :

“I am glad that everything has been settled without fuss and without scandal—I know when I am dealing with a gentleman !”

He went up to the daughter, took her by the hand, motioned the mother forward and followed them both out of the room, everyone else behind him.

“Good heavens, professor ! Whatever has happened ?”

He looked at me and shook his head with a mournful smile.

“Nothing, my boy, nothing. Everything is just the same except this : the widow Garacci has constituted herself . . . my mother-in-law !”

“Mother-in-law ?”

“Why yes, I seduced her daughter . . . who isn’t of age ; I have taken advantage of her hospitality. Goodness knows what other crime I must have perpetrated to bring together such a concourse of police—more people than I have ever before seen together in my room. . . . ‘When I have to deal with a gentleman’—that is what the official, or inspector, or whatever his name is, said—you heard him yourself. And precisely because I have the misfortune of being a gentleman I had to say that the girl was induced to come into my room at a forbidden hour, where she was found by her mother, where, in fact, we were both found by the police who were

sent for in great haste. I have been capable of doing all this ; I have let myself be caught red-handed. You wouldn't ever have believed it, my boy, never suspected ! And so, here I am, the future son-in-law of widow Garacci ! . . . In common, it seems, with a high official of I forget what branch of the civil service and with a colonel on active service who, years ago, both appear to have had my weakness, one after the other, for the widow's two other daughters . . .”

“But you have fallen into a trap ! You should protest . . . You . . .”

“Nonsense ! I won't be bothered and disturbed. However . . . destiny, or rather accident or chance, have their place in philosophy and my system. And this time chance takes the form of a girl who is luckily neither ugly, nor hunch-backed, nor stupid, poor girl ! She might have chosen better and left me in peace. But she began to love me because, so she says, I was so good. So good, forsooth ! A girl who isn't even twenty-one years old in love with an old man ! As if it were possible, especially nowadays. Oh, I feel I am being very treacherous to philosophy, but she will be indulgent because she understands everything.”

“And so you will suffer this sort of blackmail in silence !”

“There is nothing to be done about it !”

And, without adding another word, he lit his pipe.

(From “Passa l'Amore.” Fratelli Treves, Publishers, Milano.)

GIOVANNI VERGA

(1840-1922)



(I)

THE MARK OF LOVE

(Translated by Miss E. M. BAKER)

"I have lost . . . oh dear Nice
Repose . . . night's quiet repose.
Oh swiftly grant me . . . grant swift death,
Grant swift death, when I am near thee ! . . ."

sang Resca, scraping away at his guitar, embellishing the song by opening wide his mouth and knitting his brows. The strumming of the accompaniment had hardly ceased when at the corner of the Piano dell' Orbo there broke out a long, raucous applause. The friends slung their guitars round their necks and gathered round Resca, talking softly, behind the entrance of Concettina the fruiterer. As the little wicket-door remained closed, Resca said :

"That means the old woman isn't asleep yet. Good-night friends."

Then from the great arch beneath the Carmelite monastery a shadow slipped out very quietly, came up to them and addressed them with studied affability :

"Well done, gentlemen ! Fine voices and fine instruments !"

Resca stared hard at the stranger, a small, thin man, with a week's growth of beard, wearing a felt hat all on one side ; he passed the ribbon of the guitar over his shoulder, and answered, very dryly :

"Thanks !"

"Now you must do me a favour, gentlemen," the other went on—"you must come and sing another song to my sweetheart who lives close by."

The friends, seeing the turn the talk was taking, looked at each other, very serious. Resca, who was really not at all anxious to pick a quarrel there at that hour, stared the stranger full in the eyes, under the street lamp, and said, letting his words come very slowly :

"Excuse us, friend. It is late, and we must go about our own affairs now."

The other, however, would not admit defeat :

"A very, very little song ; here, two steps away."

Resca pulled his cap over his eyes and asked quietly, in a queer voice :

"What is it ? Do you want to force us ?"

"You're five. . . . How could I ?"

"Then let us go in peace."

"Then I tell you, you've no manners."

Resca took a step backwards and seized his guitar sharply by its neck. But he restrained himself ; and said once more :

"I tell you to let me go about my own business."

"Then I tell you that you have no manners !" The other flung back, very coldly, his hands in his pockets.

"Hell !"

The groups broke up abruptly, with a sudden flicker of knives. The little man, who had jumped back, putting his back to the wall, exclaimed :

"Sh ! Hell ! . . . the police !"

Close by was the scaffolding of a house being built, and in a flash the knives disappeared behind a partition.

The patrol, coming up with a swinging pace, caught sight of the group.

"We are friends," said the little man, "who were serenading our sweethearts, just by here."

"Have you a Permit ?"

"Here's the Permit," Resca replied.

At that moment the hour was striking, and in the distance

sounded some drunkard's noisy singing, and a shadow staggered zig-zag along the line of the lamps.

"There's someone singing without permission !" one of the party remarked, joking.

"Hurry up !" threatened the officer, "if not, I'll have you searched !"

The man who wanted the song for his sweetheart stood quietly watching him, as he went off with the patrol ; then he spat out behind him : "Policeman !"

"Listen, friend," Resca went on, "I don't want to make a noise here, and I've my own reason. But if you like to come under the archway over there, I'm at your service at once."

"No. I've just seen that you're a true man, and that's enough for me. For myself, you can ask whom you please whether Vanni Mendola knows his duty."

"And in that case, I, Don Giovanni, am ready to sing you the song."

"Many thanks !" said Mendola, "but I don't want the song any longer. It's enough for me to have seen your fine spirit !"

And as each one was going his own way, after many handshakes, and—"good-night ! Forgive any words, in haste . ." —Mendola drew Resca aside and said "I only wanted to show you. . . . What is your name ?"

"Giuseppe Resca, at your service," replied the other, "but they call me 'the Fair' as well."

"I wanted to show Concettina, who is now your mistress, and is listening behind the door . . . I wanted to show her, Don Giuseppe, that men cannot be judged by their riches. . . . And that if I am small in height I have a heart as big as this square. . . . But I see that you're a worthy man, and I don't want any tears in your house or mine over that shameless woman there . . . who, look ! is worth no more than this ?"

And seizing his old hat he flung it scornfully on the ground and spat on it.

Then all of a sudden the fruit-seller's little window was flung open, and out poured a stream of abuse.

"A lot you're worth ! ugly, stinking dwarf that you are ! you make me sick !"

"Let her talk, Don Giuseppe," replied Mendola calmly, holding Resca by the arm though he was not moving—"let Concettina talk ; she is angry and no longer remembers that she used not to abuse me like this, then, when she made me come here by night when her husband Grosso, good soul, was alive, here, where we are standing now !"

"You ? You slanderous liar !"

"Yes, me ! and your lover here, now, do you see him ? He believes my words more than your swearing."

"Enough !" interrupted Resca. "By the . . . enough !"

"You're right ; it's time to end it," Mendola said. And without taking any notice of Concettina who was pouring abuse out at him, he added :

"Good-night, Don Giuseppe. Very pleased to have made your acquaintance. And forgive any hasty word."

"Wait, I'm coming with you."

"Oh, I see ! I too, in my time, would have got myself killed for her, if she had told me that now the sun is shining in the sky. But talking won't mend matters. I am at your service, Don Giuseppe. When is it to be ?"

"To-morrow."

"Very well, to-morrow. Tell me what time, and where it will suit you ?"

"Do you know the Pizzolato, the old clothes business in the Vico Stretto ?"

"Who doesn't ? The big shop in the Sole courtyard ?"

"Good ? The big shop in the Sole courtyard. Be there at midday, and I, Don Giovanni, shall be there too."

Mendola went off his own way, loitering about, and the Fair passed by the widow's shop again. Dark all over. The closed door made him more angry than ever.

He came back the next day, before midday, and found Concettina combing her hair, at the back of the shop, her lovely long hair, all wavy, and she purposely took a whole

hour to disentangle it in front of him, without taking her eyes from the mirror.

"What's the matter, Concettina? Doesn't your beautiful hair want to be done to-day?" Resca began at last.

"So this is the way you love me . . . you go about with people who hate me?" she replied without even turning round.

"I met that man yesterday by chance, and it wasn't I who made him speak. But I know my duty, and don't need anyone to teach it to me. Now I've come to hear if you yourself have anything to tell me, while you are alone in the shop."

"What do you want me to tell you? I don't know that man, and I refute him, and all the lies he has had the courage to invent, by the sacrament of the Forty Hours' Exposition in the parish church!"

"Very well," said Resca getting up from the desk-stool, "very well, good-bye."

Mendola was waiting for him in the Sole courtyard, talking low with Pizzolato, a big fellow without a sign of a beard, who talked like a ventriloquist. They shook hands, and Pizzolato left them to talk together while he ran to give a look to the shop and to prepare the affair.

Vanni Mendola had shaved and put on his new Sunday clothes. By day, got up like this, he seemed smaller and leaner than ever, with a tiny face, and a blinking of the eye which made him appear to be joking all the time, and when he spoke with women he made them feel as if tickled.

"Listen," he said to the Fair, "by the Lord, I am sorry! Sometimes, you know, one word brings another, and there seems no end to it. I should have done better to keep quiet, as you feel so strongly about Concettina. It's not worth the trouble of killing oneself for that woman."

"I know. I've only come to do my duty."

"Women!" concluded Mendola, "what madness to get mixed up with them!"

Pizzolato appeared again at the door, and said he was ready.

"Listen to this too, Don Giuseppe. If you want to silence her once and for all, and get rid of her, tell her that you know of a certain mark which Mendola left her. That's all."

"Hush !" interrupted Pizzolato, "there's no need to get heated now !"

The shop-boys, busy sorting the rags, slipped out one after another at the sight of a stick their master had seized. While Mendola, the Fair and two other friends went into the shop, Pizzolato put his head in at the door and said :

"You have everything there," and closed the door.

There followed a few minutes of silence. Then a stamping in the shop, a jumping on the floor, short dry exclamation. Finally one of the friends peeped out.

"Both of them," he replied to the question in Pizzolato's eyes.

"Mind your own business, you there," the latter threatened, turning to the boys who were looking up, curious.

Mendola came out first, bent double, with his face more like parchment than before ; and after came the Fair, deathly white, supported under his arms by two friends.

"Have you done what was necessary for him ?" Pizzolato asked them. "Yes, sir, to both of them. There's no danger."

"All you go back in there and work," ordered Pizzolato in a shrill voice to the shop-boys. "And in any case, you have seen nothing !"

* * *

At the hospital they wanted to know a number of things about the Fair : who had wounded him, how, and when. Mendola, in order to escape all these troubles, had himself looked after secretly by friends, in a dark hovel. But the Fair, too, was courageous in his silence, and he lay with his face to the wall on purpose, not to be troubled.

"It was an accident, working for a saddler. I had the awl in my hand like this. . . . Very well ; have me put in prison, but I can't say anything else."

Judge and carabinieri had nothing to go on. When Conzettina sent her old mother to see how he was, the Fair said

the same things again, without even turning his head : 'I'm well, quite well. It was an accident, not worth talking about. Remember me to your daughter.'

Yet he had hardly left the hospital when, still rather weak and pale, he went to see the fruit-seller.

"Oh sainted Christian ! You nearly made me die of fright !" she said to him. "How are you now ?"

"I'm quite well," he answered, "and I have purposely come now there is no one here, to have a talk between ourselves."

"Good gracious ! Are you starting that old talk again ? What have they told you against me ? Talk clearly."

"And if I speak openly, will you answer me openly ?"

"Yes, by the Holy Madonna !"

"You've eyes which betray you, Concettina ! What have you had to do with Don Giovanni Mendola ?"

"What have I had to do with him ? Nothing ! He used to come and buy nuts and apples. So many people come ! The shop is like a sea-port. . . . My goodness, Peppino, don't look at me like that ! I will make the neighbours tell you if you don't believe me . . . I'm going to call them . . ."

"No, let the neighbours be. Tell me how things stood between you two. And if you said yes to him, when your husband Grosso was alive, why have you always said no to me, now you are a widow ?"

"Oh, you've come to insult me, have you ? That's what you've come for ? Well, since you believe that good man so easily, and still suspect me. . . . Well then, I don't want anything more to do with you, not as a husband or anything else ! . . . Let me go . . ."

"No, don't go ! Tell me why you've always said no to me who was so fond of you, whilst you said yes to that other . . . !"

"Help ! Help !"

"No, don't scream ! You let that other man see that birth-mark of yours, because you loved him. I want to leave you a mark on your face, so that everyone can see that I was fond of you too !"

He had in the little pocket of his waistcoat a coin thin as a

blade, sharpened at one edge, a little coin of two cents, which he held between his thumb and finger, and which left a mark for life where it touched.

"Help ! assassin !" screamed the woman, rushing at him with clutching nails, blinded by the blood which was streaming down her cheek.

The Fair, white as paper, in the middle of the crowd of neighbours, who shook him as they clutched at his chest to hold him, stammered out :

"Now I shall go to prison content."

(From "Vagabondaggio.")

(II)

DON CANDELORO & CO.

(Translated by E. D'ESTERRE-STAHLE)

DON CANDELORO was really an artist in his way. He was the son of a showman and the grandson of a showman—one had to be born with this hump.

His puppets were his bread, his love, his glory. "I am not what I am if I don't get them to speak !" he said, in certain vainglorious moments, such as we all have, when the applause of the public went to his head, and he felt himself a god among the clouds of his stage, pulling the strings of his "personages."

For them he grudged no expense. He perfected them—dressed them magnificently—had ideas for heads in which eyes and mouth should move, studied the authors to find the voice which each one should have—Almansor or Astiladoro. When he was declaiming for his puppets, in the final scenes he became so excited that, at the end he was quite exhausted, and stood, mopping his face, while acknowledging the applause of his enthusiastic partisans—just like a real actor.

He had admirers everywhere. Some of them saved the cost of bread to go and hear him in the story of *Rinaldo* or *Guerin*

Meschino, and they would point him out if they met him in the street, with his cane over his shoulder and stepping out with his majestic gait, looking like *Orlando* himself. It was a great occasion when he responded to a greeting, putting two fingers to the brim of his hat.

If a quarrel broke out in the theatre, and knives were produced, it was only necessary for Don Candeloro to show himself and say, in his fine, rich voice, "Hey, hey, Boys!"

As he had cultivated the voice, as well as the movements and speech of his "personages," one seemed to be hearing the *King of France* when he was only calling the shoeblack from the terrace.

* * *

The daughter of an inn-keeper whose place was next door to him fell in love with these accomplishments. The girl was ugly, but she had a fine voice, and was reputed to have considerable savings.

"The voice is everything!" said Don Candeloro, fixing great eyes on her, and stroking his beard. "Grazia! What a lovely name you have too!"

He often went to lunch at the inn for love of Grazia, and he confided to her that he was thinking of marrying and settling down, as he had now turned his back on his father's old shack and put up his own new theatre, which was stealing the customers from San Carlino and the Marionette Theatre. They fell upon one another like wolves—this father and son—and Don Carlino's colleagues had united in the endeavour to break up the old man and have the *Story of Buovo d'Antona* hissed off the stage.

"I will spend the treasure of Croesus," Don Candeloro had sworn that day, hitting the table with his fist; "but I am not what I am if I don't force him to shut up altogether."

With some ready money he would do astonishing things. He would even have the ballet and pantomime in his theatre—all done with marionettes. "I have something in here!" he said, pointing to his forehead, to Grazia, on whom he fixed great eyes as if he would have eaten her—her, and her fortune.

He cudgelled his brains a whole month long, trying to think of a good name for his theatre ; something that would catch the people by the hair and the eyes. There, on the great painted placard it was written, and illuminated from behind : "*The Speaking Marionettes*." "Yes, as true as that my name is Candeloro Bracone—speaking and living as well as you or I ! Not a dog must pass with a penny in his pocket, in front of my theatre, without saying : 'We'll spend our last cent to go and see what Don Candeloro can do for us !'"

* * *

The Inn-keeper would never have let himself be caught by all this bravado, for he knew that serious customers prefer to go and drink the good wine in some shady corner, and besides—he wanted a son-in-law with a Christian profession, such as his own, for example, and not a comedian with curling tresses, who spoke like a book, and made one suspicious.

"This," he said to his daughter, "is a fellow who would keep us on the string—you and me—like his puppets. Mind your own business ! Good words, an occasional smile with the customers, and after that, ears for orders ! Do you understand?"

But the harm had been done at a small window which opened on the scene to which, in secret, the girl frequently ran, and where her head was turned by all these tales of love-lorn paladins and princesses.

Don Candeloro, as soon as he had declared himself to her, purposely left this window ajar, and importuned her with love. *Rinaldo* and the other "personages" revolved round her until the girl was thrilled, and filled with disgust at having to wash plates and spoil her hands in the kitchen.

"Not only I, but countless knights, have been made your vassals through love, adored Princess !"

"What am I to think ?" the Inn-keeper grumbled to his daughter. "What the devil have you in your head ? You make mistakes in the bills. The customers complain. This affair cannot go on."

* * *

The catastrophe occurred during the great scene in which *la bella Antiniscia* returns to the city of Persepolis, and Guerino, when he sees her (says the story) "burned still more in love for her."

He raved all through the scene, throwing his legs about, lifting his arms to heaven, and shaking his head till it almost split with nervous spasms. Then (speaking with the fine voice of Don Candeloro) he exclaimed: "Oh, God, give me grace to defend myself against the weak flesh, so that I may find my father and my generation!"

And *la bella Antiniscia*, also shaking and weeping (this is evident from her hands, with which she covers her face) cries: "Oh, my Lord, I was hoping under the protection of your sword to be safe in the kingdom which you have restored to me. For this reason, I swear to you, by the gods, that as soon as I know of your departure, with my own hands I will kill myself for your love—but if you will promise me that your voyage being ended, you will return to me, I promise to wait ten years for you without taking a husband."

"No, by God, you would be old!" said the wicked one.

"This is a matter of indifference to me if only you will swear to return, and not take any other woman."

(Actually *la bella Antiniscia* had the voice of a chicken, and made the spectators laugh; Don Candeloro, for the woman's part, having had to hire a young girl by the day—and as she was only just beginning to grow up, she spoke like a parrot—so much so, that the Principal had to keep her in order with sundry kicks behind the scene.)

Then *la bella Antiniscia* fell into the arms of Guerino—doubled in two with emotion; and Grazia, clinging to the window felt her heart beating so hard in her breast, that she could imagine herself in the place of the two happy lovers, when the Wicked One, in the presence of Parauidas, Armigrano and Moretto, swore by all the sacraments, to make her his wife and legal spouse.

"When we are man and wife, the women's parts shall be taken by you," Don Candeloro had said to her, and the girl,

ambitious, felt her heart swell with joy during these moving scenes, which made everyone's hair stand on end, and she could see bearded men weeping like children amid the applause which seemed to shake the theatre.

"Yes, yes !" whispered Grazia in her heart.

* * *

But the father said, "No !" There were now perpetual scenes between father and daughter ; he declaring that the affair could not go on, and threatening the girl to marry again and put her under the yoke of a step-mother ; while she held to the alternatives—Don Candeloro or death.

When Don Candeloro, dressed in all his best, went to make the formal proposal to her father, the Inn-keeper replied :

"Highly honoured ! But everyone knows his own business in his own house. I am a widower, have no other children and need a son-in-law to help me."

"That means that I am unworthy of so much honour !" stammered Don Candeloro, getting red, and placing himself at three-quarters, with the cane against his hip.

"No, sir, the honour is mine."

"The honour is yours, but you will not give me your daughter."

"No, sir. How can you listen to her ?"

"All right : Your humble servant !" concluded Don Candeloro, tilting with two fingers, his tall hat over his ear, and, mortified, took his leave.

"Listen," he said, afterwards to Grazia at the window. "Your father is an ignoramus who understands nothing. We must take heroic measures. Do you understand ?"

The girl hesitated to take the heroic measure of leaving her home and going to live with him in order to make her father consent to the marriage. But Don Candeloro had honey on his lips, and knew how to find reasons which proved irresistible. He told her to tie up her bundle secretly, but judiciously, you understand ! (She also had her share of the money amongst that of her father), and to come where Heaven called her.

"Haven't you sworn by the gods to be my wife and legal spouse?"

The old man, however, was a sharp rascal who made a poor mouth, and hid his coin, God knows where.

Grazia brought away nothing but four rags done up in a handkerchief and the few shillings she could scrape together from the counter.

"What!" stammered Don Candeloro, who felt his blood freezing in his veins, "In all this time that I have been here, you have not been able to do better than that!"

This was a sign that she would be good for nothing—even to him, and the troubles began from the first day.

Enough! He was a gentleman. The promise of Don Candeloro was the promise of a king!

The best of it was that on the day when they went to the altar—he and the bride—his father-in-law had the fancy to do the same, in company with a fine woman with whom he had fixed things up there and then.

"Without women we cannot get on, my friend, neither I nor my business!" he was pleased to repeat with that smile which showed his gums—harder than teeth. "Be happy, and may the Lord prosper you, and give you many children. At my death, you will get what you deserve."

The children arrived, true enough, to both son-in-law and father-in-law, one after the other. But the Inn-keeper promised to produce as many as the Grand Sultan and to live as long as the wizard Merlin. Every time that wife or daughter gave birth to a child the whole family was invited to a great feast.

* * *

The children increased, as did also the cares of matrimony. But vice-versa the takings and popular favour diminished. That great beast, the public, had let itself be carried away by certain novelties produced by Bracone the elder and the proprietor of San Carlino.

Now, in the marionette theatres, real flesh and blood personages recited the story of Garibaldi—just imagine! also

little farces with Pulcinello. And half-naked women sang these, making an Augean stable of the stage. People assembled to see the legs and other bestialities—just like the beasts—so that Don Candeloro had to blush for his profession. He would rather play the clown or the shoe-black than descend to such depths. In order not to play to empty benches he had come to admitting old customers—faithful to the stories of *Orlando* and the Ancient Paladins—free ; with these at least he could give vent to his feelings, freely abusing his rivals.

“Why not put green blinds on the doors, as is done at certain establishments ? It would be more decent ! The Government ought to take action, by Satan !”

But the ignorance and ingratitude of the public disheartened him. It was really not worth while to sweat over books, and spend a fortune to give good things to asses. Do you want to wash the ass’s head ?

The same old puppets recited perfunctorily, dressed, God knows how ! “One loses all love of Art, and of everything else, on the word of a gentleman !”

Where were now the good times when they gave two performances on Sundays and holidays ? And the public besieged the doors as soon as a “new personage” was announced on the big board ? Don Candeloro, with an eight days’ beard, and his long hair in disorder, passed whole days in his father-in-law’s bar, ranting against his rivals, or quarrelling with the wife, since his own home had become an inferno.

Grazia, now that she had seen all that was behind the fine, plaster scenes, was kept busy mending rags and breaking her back and her arms while declaiming like a parrot, the parts of Artemise and Rosalind, from evening till two in the morning. And specially when the Lord sent her children (which happened once every year) this was a veritable chastisement of God.

“By Mahomet, you don’t know how to do anything else !” shouted her irate husband.

The inn-keeper gave nothing but good advice. “Don’t you see that customers run after new wine ? Then change the

wine !” But Don Candeloro would not bend. He would rather pick up his booth and his puppets, and wander out into the world, so as to let people know just who Candeloro Bracone was—since his own co-citizens no longer appreciated him. The Piazza was no longer any good to him. If there was any good sense and good taste still to be found, he had better go and look for it in the provinces, where these bestialities had not yet penetrated.

At last he really did pack up everything on a cart, and left, in the dead of night, to avoid giving satisfaction to his enemies. The Inn-keeper took over his place as a storeroom for bottles, and to enlarge his premises now that his own family had grown.

“It’s what I told you,” he said to Grazia. “That is no profession for Christians. If you had remained here selling wine, you wouldn’t now be reduced to play the gipsy. Much good may it do you !”

Don Candeloro travelled across mountains and valleys like the knights of old, with his whole theatre heaped up on a cart, and his wife and children a-top.

The trouble was that he found nobody with whom to fight. These peasants—ignorant and avaricious—as soon as their first curiosity was satisfied, turned their backs on the “speaking marionettes” and climbed up to the roof of the theatre in order to enjoy the spectacle gratis. Arrived in a village Don Candeloro would spread out his properties on the square, rent a shop or a store, or even a stable—whatever could be found—and set to work to rake in whoever might be there. The season lasted a week, a fortnight, a month or more ; after that the wandering began again, and in the course of all this going and coming the properties became shabby ; the cost of rent and travel ate up the proceeds, the carters being robbers worse than Saracens who had no regard for God or man.

Don Candeloro, accustomed to being respected by people such as these, at first tried to impress himself by the use of his fists. And to think that he had come to this—he, Candeloro Bracone—to play the Pagliaccio, if he wanted people to come

to his theatre—to play knock-about pantomime, in the course of which he took kicks on his behind from the youngest of his boys—just to make the rustics laugh ! As soon as he saw that the public would have nothing to do with the “speaking marionettes,” and that something quite different was required in order to squeeze ha’pence out of these animals, he had a bright idea which ought to have made the fortune of any artist—if Dame Fortune had not developed so deadly a spite against him.

“Ah so—they wanted living personages !”

One fine day the announcement was to be seen on the big board, that the part of Orlando in the *Reali di Francia* would be given by Don Candeloro in person—“his particular role.” And he duly appeared on the scene—he and all his family—in costume, and armed at every point, with armour specially ordered from the first establishment in the city, and which had cost the eyes out of one’s head. The ignorant public, however, on seeing these Jewish figures, who touched the ceiling with their heads, and rattled with every step like tins of petrol, started laughing, and throwing every kind of rubbish at the Paladins—most of all at Orlando when, having dropped his sword, he was unable to stoop to pick it up, on account of his closed armour. Groans, hisses, and ends of cigars were hurled at the *Reali*. Don Candeloro was possessed by a blind fury to hit out or to run them all through with his sword—if it hadn’t been a tin one—while thinking of all the money wasted to no purpose.

In every place at which he persisted in producing the Paladins of France with “real personages,” he had the same reception—cabbage stalks and orange peels. The public came to the theatre with pockets specially filled with these missiles. They didn’t want the Paladins—not even “with real personages.” They wanted the follies of Pulcinello, and ribald songs, sung by women who threw up their legs.

“And you shall let them see your legs !” said Don Candeloro at last, in a fury, to his wife. “Let us give acorns to the pigs !” He himself, with his own hands, had to help Grazia to

shorten her gown, quarrelling all the time with her because she maintained that she was not born to the business, and that she was embarrassed at hearing the compliments passed by the public on her thin legs.

“What do you think you were born to? To play the Princess? You eat the bread though!” He, on the contrary was seized with a rabid desire to show everything to these animals: his wife, his daughter, who, being younger, would call in more people—“also myself—if they want to see me!”

He laughed bitterly—poor Don Candeloro! He looked out the most stupid, most indecent farces. He painted his face to play *il Pagliaccio*. He spat at the public behind the scenes: “Pigs! Pigs!”

(From “Don Candeloro & Ci.”)

RENATO FUCINI

(1843-1922)



THE DAY OFF

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

IT is no use arguing, my friend ; there are some occasions when it is impossible to say "No." People press you and bother you and insist so eagerly that it would be as rude to refuse as deliberately to insult someone who merely meant to be polite to you.

If business is your excuse, they answer, "The world won't come to an end if you don't go to-day . . ." If it is too hot "It will be cooler to-morrow morning." If it is too far from the station to where they live "I'll send the trap to meet you." If you have arranged to spend the day with a friend, "Oh, bring him along, too. . . ." Well, in short, I said I would, and on Sunday morning I went and made an end of it.

As soon as I arrived in the village all among the crowd of country folk who were coming out of early Mass and who stared at me as if I were a wild animal, I asked for Signor Cosimo's house ; immediately eight or nine people offered to show me the way.

"There it is up there—do you see a house with a little tower on the roof, that's the one. What then, do you know Sor Cosimo ? He's a nice gentleman, he is. And his brother the priest ? Ah yes, that one ? . . . and his wife, Sora Flavia ? Ah, she's a kind lady, . . . and what a lot of money she does give away ! And then Sora Olimpia, . . . Signor Cosimo's sister, you might almost say, . . . She's got her own ideas, she has, seems like she's got a great passion for books, she's

always got one in her hands ; she's almost lost her head about it and then, see, she says it all over again by heart, sometimes you'd hardly believe your own ears. She's a good one, too, she is, and when one of her people wants something written down, if she wasn't there they wouldn't know what to do. First there was Bistino, sor Cosimo's eldest boy, but now he's gone to the seminary at Volterra, and they say he's done so well there, they won't ever send him home for the holidays. There's a fine boy for you ! And when he was there, even the curate went with him to help him with the nets—they caught more birds in a day than all these nets do in a week. Look here, you go up along here and you'll go straight into the house."

All this information about my hosts, some of which I already knew, was given me by the villagers who competed one with the other in informing me till they had brought me to the beginning of a short avenue leading to the house, and left me, bowing respectfully and declaring themselves my humble servants.

"Good !" I said, rubbing my hands. I was so longing to spend a quiet day in the country that I quickened my steps, to enjoy all the sooner an hour of peace in the simple home of this good old country family, far removed from all the tiresome conventions, those nicely calculated "warm welcomes" and that stingy hospitality that in town society we often have to receive, and sometimes, alas ! to give.

I rang the bell and immediately a young man in his shirt sleeves and with his white apron rolled up and held in his trouser belt, came smiling to open the door.

"Is Signor Cosimo in ?"

"Yes sir ; come in, come in. You are that gentleman from Florence who sent word yesterday that he could quite well come, sir ?"

"Yes."

"Then come in, come in. The master told me to show you into the best parlour, and he'll come down at once. You're a real kind gentleman ; it's a good thing you've come, they'd

been talking about you and waiting for you ever so long ! How's everyone at Florence ? Look, just you go in there a minute and sit down. Excuse me."

"Yes, go along—"

I sat down by the window and turned over the pages of an old photograph album. I noticed that my arrival had literally made a stir in the house because I could hear a great banging of doors on the floor above, a scrambling of feet, with shoes and without ; this made a fine shower of plaster rain down from the ceiling, and the window panes and the glass case over a waxen Christ-child on the whatnot rattled as if there was an earthquake.

In a few minutes' time I heard a scratching at the door followed by a great kick ; then the door opened and a little boy of about six came in, with a half-eaten apple in his hand, and started staring at me and then said crossly :

"That's not your book ! Put it down at once or else I'll tell my uncle, who's a priest."

I put down the album ; he went on staring at me angrily.

"You're that stranger who was going to come ?"

"Yes, darling." To appease him I spoke gently and held out my hand to chuck his chin. He made a step backwards and made a movement as if he would throw his apple at me.

"Stop that with your hands, will you ? What have you come to do here ?"

He annoyed me so I did not answer.

"Yes, yes, I know, father told you to, but mother didn't want you to come because she had to kill all those chickens and now Gostino's plucking them. But you're going away this evening, aren't you ? Won't you say anything ? But now I'm glad, because when mother saw you down the street she said the devil could . . ."

The door opened and there appeared (in bedroom slippers) the huge bulk of Signor Cosimo who, beaming with smiles, clapped his great hands on my shoulders and said three times,

"Good, good, good !"

Then turning to the boy :

"What are you doing here?"

"What I like."

He slapped him, pushed him out of the door and told me to sit down.

I noticed at once the grease spots and the wine and coffee stains all over Sor Cosimo's trousers and shirt. And, to tell the truth, I felt rather as if it were a personal insult; but I was quickly appeased by his excuses—he was sorry he had been so long, but he had been upstairs to tidy himself up a bit.

"Not at all, not at all—why, Signor Cosimo. . . .!"

"Excellent, excellent! What weather, eh? I should think you needed a bit of cooling, what? Gostino! What do they think at Florence about this weather? Excellent! You have really delighted us in condescending to come here. . . ."

"At your orders, sir."

"Gostino, go upstairs and ask your mistress to give you the key of the sideboard, and bring this gentleman something to drink." Then, to the little boy who had come in behind the servant, "And you, go outside at once and wash your face and clean your nose, you pig." And with another slap he pushed him out again.

"And no fruit this year either, my dear,—nothing."

"Oy!"

"Well, what about it? For three years you can see they've been bewitched. Just think, first I used to put aside four hundred pounds, and now . . . sometimes fifty, sometimes sixty if I'm lucky. . . . And then, look at the fruit! all maggot-eaten! You come with me up to the loft—No, I hear my brother coming; we'll wait for him."

"Let's wait."

"He's a queer sort of creature, you know, an old grumbler; but he's got a good heart. The other day, for instance, he had a fearful stomach-ache and, if you'll excuse my saying so, a boil he's got here. . . ."

The explanations preceding our introduction were cut short because Don Paolo came into the room and made a low bow. I rose to go towards him but I was interrupted—

"No, no, I won't allow it ; sit down, sir. If you don't object I will keep my hat on because it's a habit of mine—sit down, sit down."

There was a moment of silence, then Sor Cosimo began talking again :

"Paolo ; this is the gentleman we were talking about the other evening. . . ."

"I know, I know ; can't you ever have done with anything ? How many times do you want to say the same thing ?"

"No, I wanted to tell you . . ."

"Have you given him a drink ?"

"I've told Gostino to. He'll be here presently."

"So you come from Florence ?" the curate asked me.

"At your service."

"This is a terrible year, sir. If it doesn't rain we can't begin. One year, on this very day, at ten o'clock I had caught fifty-six ! and this morning before I came down at eight o'clock for Mass, there was only three little birds caught and a damned falcon that's scratched half my hand, look. . . . Do you ever catch any in Florence ?"

"To tell the truth, I've never asked."

"Has the prior of San Gaggio caught any this year ?"

"What do I know ? . . . I really can't say."

"Oh . . . because last Friday he sent me a message that he hadn't even made the cages. He says that Father Laurence of the Santissima Annunziata hasn't been at all well. Is that so ?"

"To tell the truth. . . . I don't know at all."

"What, don't you know anything then ?"

"I tell you what . . . let's talk about you. Signor Cosimo was just telling me . . ."

"I'm going back to the net for a moment. What time's lunch, Cosimo ?"

"You tell the maids what time you like."

"Oh, here's one," said Don Paolo, who was at the door just going away. "Flavia, what time is lunch ? Twelve o'clock ?"

Signora Flavia, my host's wife, nodded as she came into the room while the curate, unsaluted guest, went off to his nets.

She came towards me quietly, asked me how I was, told me she was pleased to see me before I could answer "Very well, thank you," and sat down to look at me. Sor Cosimo who was very informative, said :

"Listen, Flavia ; this is the gentleman I was talking about the other night. . . ." And Sora Flavia repeated : "How are you ?"

"Very well, thank you."

"And your wife ?"

"Very well, thank you."

"Will you remember me to her ?" Then looking at her husband as if to ask him what else she was to say to me, she relapsed into silence and stared at me.

Fortunately Signor Cosimo spared me the trouble of having to find a subject for conversation ; he started on politics. As the Tunisian question was then at its height, he naturally hit on Tunis and lost his temper, became very heated and declaimed angrily all his ideas on foreign affairs ; he came to the conclusion that if he and his brother, the priest, had been in the Cabinet, there would be no French in Tunis, not at any price, because . . . But Signora Flavia interrupted him to ask me whether there was cotton in the material my suit was made of. I contained a laugh and said "No" at random.

"Then I suppose it's very expensive ?"

"Well . . . I think it's seven lire a yard."

"Oh, you count by yards, then ? It must be very good stuff. Listen, Cosimo, you ought to have one like it. . . ."

"I know, I know—but that's a damned habit of yours, always interrupting people ; we'll talk about it afterwards." Then, turning to me again : "Because if France . . ." He was just going to begin all over again about Tunis when the door opened and his sister, Signorina Olimpia, appeared. She was an old maid of about fifty, the one who had been described as so cultured by the villagers.

She wore a faded pale blue frock with a belt, and carried a puce-coloured wrap over her arm. She had on her head a broad-brimmed straw hat, dirty and yellow and trimmed with

a spray of real ivy ; two greasy little tufts of hair projected and curled by her rather spotty cheeks. She held a sunshade and a little bunch of heliotrope in one hand ; in the other she had a book where she marked the place with her finger. She came forward with studied carelessness ; then, bowing with down-cast eyes, she said : "Oh, sir, you are welcome to our humble above !"

"And a very charming abode, indeed ; I only hope I don't intrude here."

She cast her eyes down again and smiled at me. Then she walked away coquettishly and sat down with her back to the light. She seemed to know all the obvious little wiles of an experienced woman.

I was observing her closely when I felt a great clap on my shoulder and Signor Cosimo saying : "You should hear how well she writes poetry. Olimpia, have you got that sonnet here you wrote last Sunday ?"

"That ode, you mean."

"Well, sonnet or ode, it's all the same thing. But you should hear it—with rhymes and everything ! It's . . . it's . . . Go on, let's hear it."

"Afterwards, Cosimo, afterwards."

God preserve me ! Turning to Signorina Olimpia, who still had her finger in her book, I asked :

"And may I ask what you are reading ?"

"I am just glancing at Leopardi."

"Indeed," I said ; and Signor Cosimo said, " Ah, beautiful !"

"So you've read it, too, Signor Cosimo ?"

"Damned if I haven't ! Why, she read it us last Sunday and at the end we were all crying like children."

"Why no, Cosimo, you haven't understood properly. The gentleman is talking about this book here."

"Oh . . . well, what about it ? I was talking about your sonnet. But you'll hear it, you'll hear it. And you ought to show him that one about when they ordained the Calamai boy—oh, that one ! Then . . . but you mustn't go away

thinking she's only written one or two ; why she's got a whole drawer full, one as good as the other. But you'll know when you hear them."

I was anxious to find out her opinions on Leopardi :

"What do you think of that book?" I asked Signorina Olimpia.

"Well," she answered, "to tell the truth, I haven't really studied it properly yet, but, if you want to know what I think, I don't think there's very much in it."

"Oh . . ."

"Don't you feel that, too?"

"Well, in a way, yes. . . ."

"But he never finishes anything he begins. You have the woman finding Consalvo—(well, that to begin with, is cribbed from Tasso—the part about Clorinda and Tancredi) ; you have Consalvo : well then, he dies ; and after that, at least as far as I've got, you hear nothing more about her at all. And it's just the same with his characters. That thing about Nerina would have been good but, good Lord, it's so undeveloped : don't you agree with me?"

"Yes—to be honest . . ."

"You see, Cosimo, I was right when we were talking about it the other night with Signora Amalia !"

"I should just think so," said Cosimo, marking his approval with a great guffaw. "Whoever would think of comparing you with that conceited creature? If she'd been with the Salesiane (sisters of the Order of Saint François de Sales) for seven years like you, then she might be able to argue about it. But it's no good," he went on, a little peevishly, "they can write as many as you like, but like Metastasio— . . . what, don't you agree with me?"

"On the contrary . . ."

"I don't know why you're laughing at me ! I bet that even if there were a hundred people who could write a lot of books, they couldn't write half what he's written. And good ones, too ! There's never been anyone like him—

"Go, call the dwellers in eternal shades . . ."

Oh, no, that's by our immortal Torquato. . . .

*"The warrior dreams . . .
The warrior dreams of . . ."*

"Oh yes, that's quite true"—Signorina Olimpia, who had been nodding approval all through her brother's speech, interrupted him. "Metastasio is all very well ; but this man, too, Cosimo, is charming, quite perfectly charming. And he wrote just in the same way, one line short and the next one long—it is so nice because then it's so convenient, you can put in just as many words as you like. . . . Oh they are difficult ! but how well Clasio does it, too !"

"Oh that man," Sor Cosimo exploded, "Oh that's not written very well, with all those proverbs

*The virtuous man will never fail
Through pride or cowardice,
Be he a beggar or a . . .*

Now, what about 'My Prisons' ?"

I was completely taken aback.

"Good old Gostino ! Put it here on the table and give some to this gentleman," Sor Cosimo said to Gostino, who came in at that moment carrying a bottle and glasses on a tray.

"You'll see how good this is," Gostino said, pouring out the wine. "Do you dry your grapes ?"

"That's all right, you can go now, Gostino," said Signorina Olimpia.

"Quickly, Gostino," Signor Cosimo went on, "Go and fetch two more bottles—one of the '62 vintage on the table in the back cellar, and another of '59 (that's the year of the revolution) and you'll see—" ; he turned to me again—"and you'll see, you've never drunk anything like it in your life, no offence meant, I'm sure."

"But . . . this is quite enough, thank you, Signor Cosimo."

"Nonsense ; don't make excuses— . . . while you wait, you'll take another drop of this, eh ?"

"No really, thank you : I couldn't manage it, Signor Cosimo. I'm really not used to it. . . ."

"Look, I'm having some more ; you know, a monk took a wife for company. . . . I'll pour it out. You can throw it away if you like, but I'll pour some out for you all the same."

"Well, if you really insist, I'll have just a very little to please you. . . . Thank you . . . that's enough . . . that's enough. . . ."

"Nonsense ; full up or nothing."

Gostino came back with two other bottles ; everyone began persuading me, from Signora Flavia to the servant himself, all insisting that I should try them as well. Signor Cosimo held my arm. Gostino poured out the wine, and the two women looked at me beseechingly, so that I should not offend them by refusing their hospitality.

I resisted for a moment ; but at last there was nothing to do but give in. Unfortunately I was fool enough to praise the wine and say that they must have wonderful cellars as well as delicious grapes. . . . Would I had never said such a thing !

"I should like you to see them," Sor Cosimo said, as soon as I had made the remark. He took my arm ; and leaving the ladies in the drawing-room, he dragged me off into the cellar after Gostino, who was lighting the way for us. He kept saying, "Mind, there's another step here," and "Mind your head there" ; and when we got down, he seemed much more struck than I was with the wonderful cellar, which was nothing more than a room all full of cobwebs, with four barrels along the wall and two casks in a corner.

Of course I had to be delighted and find something too to praise ; so I began admiring the way the house was built, judging from the foundations I could see.

"I'll show you over it now."

We went up from the cellar to the ground floor where I had to see everything : dining-room, ironing-room, kitchen, bake-house, pantry, cupboards. . . . Then the new staircase which used to be where the store-room is now ; and then the study that his brother, the priest, wanted to put where there had been stables, only it was really too damp there. . . . Then we went up to the first floor ; and there he showed me unex-

pectedly into Sora Olimpia's room where she was in front of the looking glass trying on the puce-coloured wrap. Then all the other rooms, the hall, the reception rooms and even the two lavatories—they were going to have one removed because it contaminated the well. . . . "Now look what a lovely view ! Over there's the kitchen garden ; we'll go there in a moment ; but first of all I'll show you the second floor."

We went up to the second floor ; then, after having piloted me round for twenty minutes or so, telling me the most important things that had happened in every room as we went into it—from the shed where they keep the silkworms to the garret where the curate shuts up his little birds in the dark—Cosimo stopped in front of a door. After making a number of gestures, as if to prepare me for seeing something wonderfully exciting, he showed me into an untidy room and made me guess who had slept there last week.

"How should I know who slept here ?"

"I'll give you a thousand guesses and you won't find it. No less a person than Sor Angiolo !"

"Well I never !" I exclaimed, playing up to his enthusiasm. He took my exclamation quite seriously and began to sing the praises of Sor Angiolo who turned out to be no less a person than the brother of the archpresbyter Dodoli and nephew of Canon Sinigaglia, who had accompanied him when Monsignor had sent him to take round receipts to the convent farm !

"You see . . . and now I must show you the dove-cote. . . . Well, no, perhaps we'll see that afterwards because now there's no time to lose. They're just ringing for church and we must be quick because the provost of the Siepole is taking the choral Mass at eleven and he's a very devil for punctuality. Good fellow, though. . . . You'd enjoy talking to him, too, because whatever you ask him, he knows absolutely everything. You must talk to my sister about him. . . . Gostino sleeps in here . . . and you'll see what kind of person he is. Now in here, you see, there used to be the door that led into the loft, but we had to block it up because of the rats. I'll

show you all the rest afterwards, but now we'd better go or we shall be late."

We met the curate at the bottom of the stairs ; he had just come back from his nets and was puffing and panting and grumbling at the provost's punctuality. "What, did he think he wouldn't be in time for lunch, the old gormandiser ? Get along, Cosimo, there's a good fellow,—oh, damn this business—and tell him to get himself ready in the meantime and I'll come along in ten minutes ; and if they won't wait they can sing by themselves ; and don't let them bother about me . . ."

"You see," Sor Cosimo explained, "He's always like that ; when he's not catching birds, he's just like a great animal. Come along, come along ; the ladies will come by themselves."

"They've gone already, sir," said Gostino.

"So much the better. Shall we go then ?"

So I, who was longing for a moment of rest and relaxation, followed Sor Cosimo ; he, in fear and trembling at his brother, went at such a frantic pace that I could hardly keep up with him.

* * *

I watched the proceedings through an atmosphere thick with smuts and sweat. Signor Cosimo had placed himself in the choir at the left-hand side of the front row, so that he should not be hidden by the main altar. Round the altar, the priests were saying Mass : their gold-wrought vestments flashed at every movement, lit by a soft dusty sunbeam that fell obliquely from a window high in the wall. Next there was a free space, then two blocks of seats for the women ; in the middle there were four or five smartly dressed creatures who spread a white handkerchief to kneel on, with well-oiled hair and solid shoes. At the end of the church were grave-looking men, good Catholics who made no show of their virtue ; they had shiny bald heads, snuffly colds and bright blue handkerchiefs.

Signora Flavia was praying fervently in a separate pew in the chapel of the Seven Sorrows ; her head was almost buried in her prayer book. Signorina Olimpia, who was sitting at her

right, was dreaming and smiling sweetly at something that absorbed her attention in the dim mysterious depths of an aisle.

The bellows of the organ wheezed ; now and then its breathy lungs emitted a solitary, diffident note or a gay little run so that Sor Cosimo turned quickly to look at me, and the curate turned quickly to look at the organ, and stared like a startled snake.

Mountains stay where they are ; only men go on. When Signor Cosimo dashed out by the presbytery door and left me to wait in the church porch, I noticed a decently-dressed man whose face seemed familiar to me. Mine seemed familiar to him, because each time we crossed each other as we walked up and down, he let his eyes rest on me and seemed ready to break into a friendly smile and talk to me. I was doing the same, when, as we crossed each other for the third time, he whispered my name. Then I suddenly remembered his and turned round ; and we embraced with such warmth and brotherly tenderness that when our eyes met, they were wet with tears.

"After nineteen years ! Whatever are you doing here ?"

"I'm the village doctor here ? What about you ?"

"I'm here for a little holiday."

"Come and have lunch with me."

"I've promised to go out already."

"Who with ?"

"I'll tell you afterwards. Now let's talk about ourselves ; tell me about yourself, and our friends and what you do all the time. Oh what a lot I want to ask you, all the news of our college friends ; and I've got so much to tell you, too." Here followed a rush of questions : "What happened to So-and-so ?" "What is What's-his-name doing now?" "Is Tizio still alive?" "What's become of Caio ?" And each bit of news was supplemented by a sympathetic word or regret, "He's dead"—"He turned out badly," "He made off and no one ever heard of him again" . . . "He's in prison" . . . Hardly ever "He's flourishing," or "He's alive" or "He's very happy."

"And how are you getting on?"

"As you'd expect a country doctor to."

"Do you get on well with the yokels?"

"No, badly."

"Why?"

"I'm not an animal like them; I'm a gentleman."

"I see. And what about the local authorities?"

"Badly, too. The mayor can't stand me and I expect I shall have to leave the place soon."

"What for?"

"I was thoughtless enough to contradict him in the public dispensary when he quoted Monsignor della Case and Flavio Gioia as authorities on etiquette."

"And who is this prodigy of learning?"

"The most wealthy, the most cultured, the most respectable person in the village; a certain Signor Cosimo . . ."

"Why, that's my host!"

"Are you staying with him?"

"I am."

"How's that? No, don't tell me now though; come and see me after lunch; then you can tell me all about it and we'll be able to talk until you have to go. I've got lots of things to tell you. I'll take you to the station with my old horse. Let's go into church now; they've started the service. What are you smiling at?"

"I was just thinking that nineteen years ago you would never have suggested such a thing."

"I've got six children now."

He preceded me into the church; I followed him, and noticed with sorrow how much he had altered. In the soul of that poor little thin body, with all its white hairs, how many hopes had been dissipated and how many illusions shattered! Then that egoism with which Nature has providentially endowed even the best of her children came to console me and turned my melancholy thoughts into fitful complacency when I compared myself with him.

"Here are my masters," he said with a bitter smile, as soon

as we had stopped in a corner at the back of the church.

"They are all over there. Do you know any of them?"

"Just Signor Cosimo's family ; no one else."

"It would be worth while introducing some of them to you ; they're really worth your attention. They wouldn't be a bad lot if only they weren't spoilt by that conceited ignorance of theirs. They're all famous, though, all good fellows, and all very much admired because everyone else is a bigger ass than they are. You see the priest who's officiating? That's the Provost of the Siepole. He's a worthy theologian, oil-merchant, confessor to the nuns, good liver, and kind protector to his many nieces. He doesn't care for me, but he puts up with me now since I cured him of indigestion he got after eating strong cheese and beans."

At that moment the Provost of the Siepole was sitting in the pew of honour, with a contrite expression ; he beat his breast with crossed arms, and sighed deeply as he looked up to heaven.

"He must be quite an old man, though," I observed.

"Well over sixty. And the man who's on his right," the doctor went on, "is his curate, who can't bear me and goes round telling everyone that I'm a heretic because once I refused to certify him ill when he wasn't. I think that for nepotism there really isn't much to choose between them. But they're always together ; and when the curate is with the provost, his business is to water down all his chief's swear-words—like when they lose at cards, the provost says "Good God !" and the curate says "Great Scott !"—and so they go along saving appearances as best they can. But sometimes the provost thinks he's being insulted and then he gets offended and scolds the poor curate ; then of course when he's angry he scatters "Good Gods" to the four winds like the beads of a broken necklace ; and the curate goes round putting everything right with his "Great Scott, Great Scott !" He's quite unmoved by threats—he'd rather go to the stake than give in. He's the best harrier in the neighbourhood and he'd beat anyone at *briscola*. All the yokels adore him because he gets

through the Mass in ten minutes, confesses very leniently and if anyone insults him he nearly beats them into their grave. That thin little creature on this side is one of the so-called lower clergy ; he's a good fellow, poor as a church mouse, and in spite of no health to speak of he struggles along to support an old sister and two little nephews that he's bringing up and teaching—he's their schoolmaster and father and uncle all in one ; and meanwhile he helps to make both ends meet by taking four or five pupils that he gets for a lira a month, and goodness knows how he manages to live ; in spite of his poverty he's kept an absolutely stainless reputation as a good citizen and a model priest. And what's more he (*rara avis*) doesn't call down God's wrath on his country. In the village—you can quite well understand it—people either pay no attention to him at all or else they remember him to despise him.

That's Sor Cosimo's brother—you know him, of course. I'll tell you a story about him, only now we'd better kneel down, it's the elevation."

Everyone knelt down to their solemn contemplation and the organ played a slow version of the quick tune in *Il Trovatore* "*Di quella pira l'orrendo fuoco*," turning "*allegro*" into "*adagio maestoso*."

At the moment of consecration all the usual confused murmur of shuffling feet, rattling beads, and inevitable general coughing was still ; the atmosphere seemed to become more and more stuffy and smelly, when the doctor began talking again in a whisper.

"And Sor Cosimo's brother, whose nickname is Cotenna, is that one who . . ." and here he spoke into my ear : "*. . .*"

"Well I never !" I exclaimed, in amazement. "Every day ?"

"I give you my word for it."

Sor Cosimo was smiling at me from the end of the church and pointed to the organ as if to say "Have you heard ?—What a fine instrument . . . what an organist, too !"

"And that man, with the black silk scarf round his neck—the one who's kneeling next to Sor Cosimo," the doctor con-

tinued, is the miller, Stelloni, the chairman of the education committee. Sor Cosimo elected him to the post because, considering how much Stelloni had always hated schools ever since he was little, then the Council could be sure he wouldn't launch out into unnecessary expense. And so Alderman Stelloni, faithful to his office, has never even set foot inside a school. He says, just so as not to involve himself in anything, that it's because things there aren't to his liking ; but all the people say it's because he's afraid he might have to ask the boys questions. He's a good fellow, though, and he's no grudge against anyone except the schoolmaster, look—that pale youth over against the pillar there—because on one of his son's compositions he corrected *appetito divoratrice* into *appetito divoratore*. Stelloni just tolerated him kindly as long as the question was undecided ; but when they'd made sure that the master was right, then the alderman's kind tolerance turned into implacable hatred ; and now he's looking for the next opportunity to throw him out of his job.

“That skinny old man, at the end of the row on the right, is one of the richest men in the village, a sort of executor and retired solicitor ; he used to be mayor before Signor Cosimo. He's got a passion for cracking nuts with his head and contradicting on principle whatever Signor Cosimo says before the Council. He's immortalised himself by means of two inscriptions he had put up when he was in office, with his own name in capital letters ; one's at the public well, when he had the pump put up, and the other, that's over there, look, where the plaster's been scraped off, was when he had the pyx in the chapel of the Seven Sorrows regilded at his own expense. He bothered the Council to let him have a proper road made up to his house ; but then, as he didn't manage to get that passed, and as his request for a knighthood had been turned down, he retired in a fury, and now he lets off steam by objecting to everything that comes before the Council, dismisses one of his tenants every year and curses the Government at every possible opportunity, not excepting the time when all the early tomatoes in his garden are killed by frost.”

"So you're at the mercy of all these people?" I said.

"Yes, I am."

The "*Ite, missa est*" broke short our conversation. The Provost of the Siepole intoned it with eyes shut, throat contracted and livid cheeks; he threw back his head to make his voice more weighty, among the other priests who stood reverently beside him. And so he revelled in his voice for two whole minutes; then after an *i . . . i . . . i . . . i . . .* which seemed as if it would never come to an end, he rolled out breathless "*issa est.*"

The sexton went round putting out the candles; the priests rushed off to their lunch, and the congregation, after a moment's silence, crowded to the doors.

When we were in the porch, the doctor left me to avoid meeting his chief, after repeating most warmly that I must go and see him after lunch, and that he would see me to the station; he had some important things to tell me.

Sor Cosimo came up running to meet me; with him were several people to whom he introduced me. He slapped my shoulders affectionately, spoke familiarly and made a lot of jokes about me to show that I was a person you could trust completely. We waited a moment for the curate and the ladies; then we set off all together to do penance, as Sor Cosimo said and as his wife repeated.

* * *

Just as we were going in to lunch, Sor Cosimo said to me, as he shook my hand heartily: "We're going to have a good time together to-day; excellent, excellent!" Signora Flavia repeated for the sixth time that I really was going to do penance because they were only giving me the usual Sunday lunch.

"Good heavens!" I exclaimed, pretending to be annoyed; but I really said it because I couldn't stand things any longer. And with Signorina Olimpia who went mincing along in front of us, after she had given me a killing glance and a bunch of jasmine, we went into the dining-room which was all decked out for the solemn occasion; the air smelt of linen just fresh from lying among quinces and lavender.

"Now here," Sor Cosimo began, "we do things very simply ; just a little soup, a little boiled meat, another little dish or two just like every day and that's all." He crossed himself and said grace.

The little boy stood gaping as soon as he came into the room, looking around in amazement ; and when he saw all the preparations that had been made, especially a side table all covered with little cakes, sweets and bottles, he could not control himself and, turning round to me, began shouting and banging his hands on the table :

"Good, good ! Look, to-day because you're here, look what lovely things there are to eat !"

Signor Cosimo gave him a furtive kick which luckily did not touch him, but everyone noticed and relapsed into stony silence.

The women sighed ; the men looked at the little boy furiously, and I turned to ask Signor Cosimo what his son had said. My device worked perfectly ; everyone's face relaxed. Then Gostino, in his shirt sleeves, came in with the soup tureen.

Signora Flavia called him immediately and whispered something into his ear. At the next course, Gostino appeared with his hat and coat on. Signora Flavia called him again, and when he came back with the meat, he had no hat on and kept glancing at his mistress as if to make quite sure that it was all right now. Signora Flavia nodded ; but Signor Cosimo told him by another glance that really he ought to know those things by himself without having to be told. Gostino shrugged his shoulders to show that all that stuff was a nuisance, and suggested I should take another helping of chicken.

Gostino's politeness gave the signal for assault. The company, and particularly Signor Cosimo, had begun to warm up with the wine. One of Signor Cosimo's tenants came in to say that seven bullfinches had just been caught in the curate's nets. This livened up everyone considerably, and these good people nearly killed me with kindness. Gostino tilted the whole dish of fowl on to my plate so that a great avalanche of

meat, enough to feed a famished dog, came down, helped along by Sor Cosimo's fork and the curate, who kept jogging Gostino's elbow.

"But I can't eat all this !"

"Oh yes, without bread, of course you can."

"It's impossible."

"Well then, that means you don't like chicken."

And he gave me a great slice of beef. I had to eat everything I was given, and I was doubly miserable when I realised that we'd only just begun. After that came a huge series of stews, seven in all ; two made with chicken, one with veal, two with beef, one with sweetbreads and one with turkey and macaroni. . . . I was absolutely at the end of my capacity ; but I had to have some of everything. I simply must try this because it had cauliflower in, the first of the season. I must eat some of this because if not they'd all be offended, and then this because there was spinach in, and spinach was so difficult to get hold of nowadays : and I can't refuse this because Signorina Olimpia made the sauce. Good heavens . . . I can't eat a mouthful more ! I was miserably hot and uncomfortable ; and then, as if that wasn't enough, all the flies, that are so particularly obstinate in autumn, began tormenting me and sticking in the sweat that was simply streaming down my cheeks. Sor Cosimo, who was getting more and more insistent, helped me to some salad—just a little, it was so very light ; then the priest hurled a great piece of meat on to my plate ; and meanwhile Gostino was shouting at me from behind, and saying I was eating absolutely nothing, and Signora Flavia was complaining because I didn't seem to care for the lunch she had provided.

"Here's the joint ! now we're really getting going ! Come along !" But with the joint the drinking began. The priest seized a bottle of white wine ; Sor Cosimo took one of *aleatico*, and Gostino one of sparkling vermouth.

"No, no, no, Gostino ; wait a minute," the women shouted, holding their napkins up to shield themselves. Sor Cosimo put down the *aleatico* and exclaimed : "Lord, don't I remem-

ber last time ! "Look," and he turned to me eagerly, "Look at those stains up on the ceiling ! Here, Gostino—I'm going to uncork it myself."

Signor Cosimo stood up, with the bottle in his hand ; he was looking round in vain for a place where he could turn its neck without splashing anyone. Above there was the ceiling, all beautifully painted ; below there was the new mat ; there were the women opposite who had hidden behind their napkins and stopped up their eyes with their fingers ; on the right there were the priest and the sideboard.

"Look, the window, sir," suggested Gostino.

"Good for you, Gostino." He made for the window ; he worked the cork round and round, very slowly and very cautiously, for a while ; and then we heard a great "Good Lord ! What's the matter ?" and to make quite sure, he went on pulling out the cork so that finally it fell with a dull thud, like the criminal's head at the feet of his executioner.

"Quick, Gostino, bring me another." Another bottle was produced ; but as soon as the string was cut a terrible catastrophe occurred. The wine squirted out hissing like a wild cat ; and Sor Cosimo, who was turning round and round frantically to avoid spoiling anything, only succeeded in splashing the whole room ; the curate swore and said that he had got wine all down his neck and the women, who had their heads under their napkins, screamed.

"Another, Gostino !"

"No, that's enough, Signor Cosimo."

"For heaven's sake, Cosimo"—the women besought him.

"You're behaving like a baby," Don Paolo grumbled.

But Sor Cosimo, who saw his reputation as a connoisseur of wines in danger (in spite of the fact that he had given himself a prize for it at the village show in the previous year) insisted on seeing the matter through and at last he did so quite successfully. Gostino brought a third bottle which he uncorked with great effort ; and finally peace reigned.

●But the floods of kindness became more impossible than ever after my hosts had cheered themselves up with the third

bottle. I found my plate piled high with little birds that seemed to appear from all sides ; and the little boy threw one at my face while his family shrieked with laughter at his unexpected sense of humour. And then I had to eat all those little birds as well !

"Without bread . . ."

"Yes—damn the bakers," I said, laughing viciously. Then Signorina Olimpia wanted me to let her give me a sparrow. "Such a delicious bird," she assured me, "such tender flesh !"

"I can't refuse anything you offer me, signorina."

"It's the last one !" I said to myself. "I'll sacrifice myself once and then that'll be the end."

"Thank you—but you know I'm really making a great sacrifice. . . ."

"I shall be grateful to you all my life for making it," she said, and looked smiling somewhere behind me. I turned round and saw the curate, who was standing as stiff as the statue of Fate, holding two larks by their feet ; he thrust them in my face and said in a threatening voice : "You will never refuse these. I caught them this morning myself : and I'm sure you never get any at Florence so fresh and plump—or even if you do get them, they never let you have them for less than four *palanche*."

He deposited them on my plate and stood gazing at me with sudden affection engendered by his last glass of wine which, it seemed to me, was beginning to make itself felt.

Then they had salad with hard-boiled eggs, then fruit, then sweets, then more wine and then, thank God, it was over ! But I think that my hosts, although they had triumphed over me, weren't particularly glorious victors. They all undid their trousers or their waistcoats or their corsets, they puffed and panted, their faces were swollen and their eyes were red. Only Signorina Olimpia had not changed because she lived not in the flesh but in the spirit ; she still posed in graceful attitudes, and now and then sympathised sweetly with my unfortunate condition.

And what did we talk about at lunch time? Nothing. It was nothing but an endless wrangling, offering and refusing food, offering again; "Have some more," and "No thank you"; "But you're not eating anything—you've drunk nothing at all"; then great guffaws of laughter whenever anyone thought of a new idea for persuading me to over-eat.

"Oh your poems, Olimpia, your poems!" shouted Cosimo to his sister. "Your sonnet about Calamai!"

I turned round to look at Signorina Olimpia and I read in her eyes how solemn an occasion this was; I was quite grieved at her expression. Signora Flavia made me feel just the same; even in the little boy's face I seemed to discover a sort of fear. Everyone looked at Signor Cosimo questioning, and then looked at the end of the table, just at his right.

Just then Signor Cosimo called Gostino with an anxious voice. Gostino came in with two of the villagers who seized Don Paolo by the arms and practically dragged him from the room. I sprang up to help him; but Signor Cosimo held me back and explained, half-grieved and half-ashamed, that I wasn't to worry, it was what usually happened.

"He'll be all right in a couple of hours. He's only feeling sick . . . when he eats rather a lot. . . ."

"But why *does* he eat such a lot?"

Sor Cosimo shrugged his shoulders.

"Does it often happen?"

"Every day, poor thing," Signorina Olimpia answered.

"Oh, it's a great nuisance!"

"What does the doctor say?"

"Oh, yes . . ." Cosimo exclaimed. "You know that . . . that . . . well, I'll tell you what that doctor says; he laughs—the doctor *laughs*—and when we sent for him the second time for one of these usual little upsets, when I'd actually sent the carriage for him, too—do you understand?—well, he had the *cheek* to say, "Curate, another time I should water it." You see what the doctor said—but he'll never set foot in *my* house again and I hope . . . what, Flavia?"

Gostino came and whispered something into his master's

ear ; Cosimo answered snappily that he'd better cover it with sawdust, clear it up and stop bothering him.

"Flavia, where are we having coffee? Here or in the garden?"

"Let the gentleman decide."

"In the garden, in the garden," I said eagerly, longing to get out of the stuffy room and to enjoy a breath of autumn air ; it was a lovely day that made me all the more discontented at my captivity. All the time I envied the finches that warbled their woodland songs over there in the hills, and the larks that trilled as they flew far away in the misty plains to the south.

Signor Cosimo went off, saying that he would be back in a moment. Signora Flavia ran after Gostino, who had come to ask for the key of the woodshed ; the little boy had gone to sleep, stretched out on two chairs. Even Signorina Olimpia went off in a great hurry, saying that an urgent need obliged her to leave me.

I was hardly conscious of what was happening. I lit a cigar and stretched my legs out under the table ; I felt all swollen like a toad, and as if there was an iron band round my head. Then I let my head drop on to the back of the chair—I should like to have had a little nap there, it was so comfortable and convenient. Then I heard a great ringing—the same bell I had rung when I came in the morning ; and all my hosts except Don Paolo rushed back into the room shouting that "the gentlemen" had arrived and we must go and meet them at the gate. "All right, I'm coming," I said, almost in a dream, and automatically I followed my hosts.

Gostino came running up to open the gate. Then I saw an awkward little band of five people coming up the drive. There were three priests and two laymen, all as red as turkey cocks, yelling and gesticulating and screaming like lost souls. Outside the gate was a whole crowd of boys and villagers ; some had clambered up on to the gate and some had stuck their heads between the bars, but everyone was gazing open mouthed at what was going on inside.

Sor Cosimo took my arm and led me forward to introduce

the Provost of the Siepole, his chaplain and the parish priest, and then Alderman Stelloni and the town clerk.

We went into the verandah where the servants had put chairs round a stone table, and after a moment Gostino came along in his shirt sleeves because he had just started washing up, to bring the coffee. It seemed for a moment as if the conversation was going on as lively as it had begun, but instead it cooled off suddenly ; I rather think it was because I, being a stranger, made all these people rather shy. So it lapsed into a series of forced questions and answers, mostly monosyllabic ; this went on until the town clerk set off on the subject of the district council. He began by slandering people ; then he took two documents out of his pocket and asked Signor Cosimo to sign them. Gostino was sent for a pen and ink. Then Cosimo put on his glasses solemnly and signed, and after that he sat and looked at his own signature approvingly as if he were saying "You see how well I manage everything !"

"And what about the smallpox, Stelloni ?"

"Well, it seems to be *propagating*, Signor Cosimo. And what's worse, it seems to be getting more severe," Stelloni answered, throwing his head back and crossing his legs. Then the conversation began to wake up. As soon as Stelloni had lain the corner-stone of a great edifice with his "*propagating*," the Provost of the Siepole began talking about his "*ecstatic*" flowers that he had brought indoors for fear of frost. His chaplain told me that he wasn't *agricultural* because he had never grown lemons in his garden ; and then Stelloni told me that several years ago he hunted a good deal, but that now he had become "*abstemious*," partly because his legs weren't what they were, and partly because his best hound had his eyesight quite *alienated* because of all the damp in the marshes. He began talking about mixed schools and said they were extremely economical, but he didn't care at all for all that indiscriminate *mysticism* of boys and girls together. Signor Cosimo chipped in and said how sorry he was not to be able to show me the *aquatic system* he had installed in the fountain—only the keys of the machinery happened to be in Don Paolo's chest.

Signora Flavia stared at us quite heedless of what we were saying, sleepy and absorbed ; then when a noise of broken crockery came from the kitchen where Gostino was washing up, she opened her eyes even wider. Signorina Olimpia seemed bored with the conversation which she deemed beneath her, and wandered about in the garden looking lovingly at the flowers : at last she stopped in front of a tea rose, among whose leaves two bees were struggling together. "Ah, dear creatures !" she exclaimed.

*"And sucking one brief moment
Now at this flower, now at that,
Disgusted and disdainful . . .
Ah, said he . . .*

"A real poet, Signorina Olimpia is !" shouted the Provost. "Always quite the poet ! Did you write that, Signorina Olimpia ?"

"Now, Olimpia, there's no getting out of it—we shall be late if you're not quick," Signor Cosimo declared. "Quick, the sonnet about Calamai—now that really *is* lovely."

"It's a real gem," said the provost. "I've got the whole thing in my head—every word of it. I can say it as if I'd got it written out in front of me. . . .

*"Rejoice O youthful boy, meanwhilest you waits
The paraclete divine . . ."*

"Oh, good heavens !"

"Good Lord !"

The provost glanced at his chaplain ; Signorina Olimpia was just about to say the sonnet when suddenly Don Paolo appeared at the door of the house. His clothes, his arms and legs, his mouth and eyes and his hair all streaming. He stopped on the threshold and began staring at the ground.

Everyone got up to congratulate him on his recovery and to ask him how he was feeling.

"Oh my heart, my heart !" He put his hand on the left side of his chest, shut his eyes and explained that he'd got such a pain he could hardly breathe. Then :

"Cosimo, how did they get along at the nets ?"

"Five more, Don Paolo," shouted Gostino from the kitchen.

"Five ! Why that means we've got fifteen to-day !" yelled Don Paolo, restored to health as if by magic. "Gostino, bring me my hat and my stick !"

Sor Cosimo signalled to us that we ought to go to the nets, too, because it would please his brother. But the three priests excused themselves and said they had to go to Vespers ; so they got out of it nobly ; and the rest of us set off to the nets, Sor Cosimo, the town clerk, the alderman and I, to the great delight of Don Paolo, who skipped about in front of us and kept telling me that he had put a fine bullfinch aside for the Prior of San Gaggio, and would I be so kind as to deliver it for him ?

But the time was getting on ; it had struck three o'clock ; the train left at six ; it took three-quarters of an hour to get to the station, and I was absolutely determined to go and pay a little visit to the doctor. I wanted to talk about old times ; but above all I wanted to get out of all this—it was really past a joke.

"Signor Cosimo . . . I . . . I . . . I hope you'll excuse me, I ought to go down into the village."

"Do you want anything ?"

"Yes . . . I haven't any cigars left."

"Here's half a one," the alderman said at once.

"But I . . . but . . . I've got a postcard I really ought to write."

"You know," said the town clerk, "that you'll find the post office shut by now."

"I'll give you one, and you can write it when we get back to the house," said Sor Cosimo.

It seemed quite hopeless. If I told him I had arranged to see the doctor it would be as bad as insulting him openly.

"Let's go then. But if you don't mind, I'll have to be quick."

"We can go there and back in half an hour," said Don Paolo. And we followed him like sheep. He seemed to have recovered completely and led us at a frantic pace up a little lane, all stony and terrifically steep.

At the little hut there was an awful scene because the trapper was asleep. We waited there half an hour without succeeding in catching anything, while Don Paolo never stopped looking out of the window ; he murmured now and then, "Sh . . . sh . . . here's one !" and kept up a constant flow of whispered conversation—all about the wonderful improvements he'd invented for his nets ; at last, thank God, we came away.

But we didn't go straight back to the house because Sor Cosimo wanted to show me the new field and then the wood where the trees had been cut down ; then Don Paolo wanted to go round by the old nets so that I could compare them with the new ones. Stelloni wanted us to go up—it was only a step or two further on—to the top of the hill ; you could see his house from there. Goodness knows where they wouldn't have dragged me off to if those blessed bells hadn't begun ringing for Vespers !

When they heard the bells everyone started rushing down hill because they couldn't possibly start singing without Sor Cosimo and Stelloni. When we got to the house we had to have another drink ; the women were all ready waiting for us ; Gostino asked what time he was to get the horse ready ; and then we all rushed off to Vespers at a great pace because we were rather late already.

As we were crossing the square (I was imprisoned in the midst of my hosts, and Signorina Olimpia was holding my arm) I saw the doctor in the distance near the dispensary, signalling to me as if he wanted to know what on earth I was doing now.

I made a sign to him—"I don't know whether it's clear or not . . ."

He shook his head smiling and went on talking to a villager who was sitting beside him.

I was put in the place of honour in the choir, all among the choir boys ; the yelling was appalling ; they stank of stale garlic and screamed as if they wanted to knock my head off.

In the midst of all this enthusiasm I began opening my mouth along with the choir boys to please the peasants who

were gaping at me from their places round the lectern, as if they expected me to give out some particularly loud noise, like a really proper sort of visitor. But I was rather weak and even Signor Cosimo took my refusal kindly when I said I couldn't sing a part in the anthem with him and Stelloni.

My admirers must have been very much astonished when they saw me (they were still gaping at me long after the service was over) following the others into the presbytery where the priest insisted that I should take a drop of wine with him, otherwise he'd be offended.

The Provost of the Siepole started playing cards at once with three of the villagers ; and we went off together.

"Unless, of course," Sor Cosimo said, standing firmly in front of me and looking at me beseechingly, "you'd like to stay the night. . . ."

"It's quite impossible," I said so definitely that I was sorry afterwards ; he looked so miserable and helpless when he heard my rather rude refusal.

"I'm sorry. . . . I didn't know . . . I didn't think you'd be offended . . . please excuse me. . . ." Poor devil, he was quite right. So I stroked him affectionately and made a suitable little joke that quite reassured him. Indeed, as soon as we had come out into the cemetery, he stopped at the first barrow where they were selling wafers, and insisted on stuffing quantities of them into all my pockets.

But it was getting late. As we went back across the square, the doctor made me a sign which meant we should meet again in Florence ; then I went on like a criminal convicted of high treason, who sees in court all his friends and relations ready to receive him with open arms ; but he is not even allowed a last kiss or an embrace before leaving them, perhaps for ever.

I turned round and saw my friend waving "Good-bye ; good-bye !" in the distance.

Gostino had got the horse ready : and when I saw it I gave a sigh of relief that made me feel really better. I needed something to make me feel better ; I was really in a pitiful condi-

tion. I could hardly stand up, I was so tired after standing and dawdling about all day ; I felt rather upset in my inside, with reason ; my head ached and I felt heavy all over. Oh how I longed to be home again !

But it wasn't the end of it yet. While I was settling down in the carriage, Signora Flavia came up quietly and said, while the others stood motionless all around : "I wonder whether you'd do us a favour—you are so kind. Look, I've written everything down so that you'll be sure not to forget."

She read, in the dim light :

"First : Take Sora Amalia's glasses to the oculist at the Canto alla Paglia, to have the glass that came out put back."

Gostino has the lens in his pocket, he'll give it you at the station. Secondly—*Four yards . . . or, if not, seven feet, you'll know which is best . . . of stuff like your suit, and send it on Thursday by the carrier."*

"Have you remembered about the bird-lime, Flavia ?"

"Yes, I've put down everything. Now be quiet . . . *"the carrier who lives just outside the San Frediano Gate, just where there's written, 'Stables and coachhouse.'"*

"What about the wine ?" Sor Cosimo asked.

"I've put that down next :—

Third : *tell Scatizzi the wine merchant in Borgoguissanti—I'm sure you know him—that if he wants another call of that wine, now's the moment."*

"But have you forgotten the bird-lime and the bullfinch ?" Don Paolo said, impatiently.

"Now's your turn—

Fourthly : *Three pounds of bird-lime, that you get in that little street going from the Via Calzaioli to the Ghetto."*

Have you put the saucepan back in its place, Gostino ?"

"Yes, ma'am ; but you'd better be quick now, it's getting late."

Fifth : *a bullfinch to take to the Prior of San Gaggio."*

"Have you got it, Gostino ?"

"Yes, sir. It's under there, tied to the axle."

"And be sure to give him my kind regards," said Don Paolo.

"And tell him I caught fifteen to-day, and will he send me a message how many they get down there in their nets."

"And here," Signora Flavia pointed to a great bundle tied behind the carriage, "I've put a little of that salad you said you liked so much."

"But . . . well, really . . . thank you, Signora Flavia . . . I'm sure it's very kind of you."

"And this"—Signorina Olimpia came up to me, "I should like you to take as a little souvenir of me," and she gave me a sheet of paper folded in four, shook my hand three times, and wished me "Bon voyage !"

"Best of luck !"

"Good-bye !"

"Bon voyage !"

"Don't forget us !"

"Come back soon !"

"Good-bye, good-bye !"

Gostino flicked the horse with his whip and we set off at a gallop.

"Ah . . . ah ! well, Gostino ?"

"Well what ? I only get ten lire a month and they expect me to work like a nigger. Good Lord !"

"Lovely evening !"

"Yes, sir, lovely weather."

As soon as we'd got out of the village, I glanced at Signorina Olimpia's souvenir. I roared with laughter ; it would have done anyone good to hear me. It was the autograph of the sonnet on the occasion of the ordination of the Calamai boy.

(From "Le Veglie di Nerí," various Publishers.)



GIUSEPPE GIACOSA

(1847-1906)



A STRANGE GUIDE

(Translated by E. D'ESTERRE-STAHLL)

I HAD, one time, a very strange guide ; he was restless and verbose, so unlike all the rest of his class, that during the first half of the way I spent my time trying to think of some pretext for turning back, and during the second half, reproaching myself for having misjudged him.

The manner in which he presented himself to me, his behaviour, his expression, his dress, his walk, his accent, and even his Herculean strength—which was really extraordinary—everything about him gave rise to the gravest suspicions.

I was at the Hotel del Giomen at Breuil, in the Val Tournanche, and wanted to go to Val d'Ajazz to the Hotel del Fiery, where I had given a rendezvous to several friends. The Colle, or hill, of the Cime Bianche, which is the direct route, I had crossed on other occasions, and as this was a good eight hours' walk, it seemed worth while to lengthen it by three or four more, reach the Piccolo Cervino—one of the most exquisite peaks of Monte Rosa—and descend from there to Val d'Ajazz. But having considerable baggage, I required a mule to carry it, via the Cime Bianche, to Fiery—and also I needed a guide. At the moment there was not a single mule to be had, and the only guide was a Swiss from Zermatt, who wouldn't hear of carrying any weight.

It seemed as if the whole expedition would fall through, not only the excursion to the Piccolo Cervino, but also the meeting with my friends.

On the eve of the day fixed for my departure, I was standing in the twilight, at the door of the Hotel, looking anxiously

towards the meadow-lands which ascend to St. Teodulo, for any chance guide or carrier who might be returning, when the hotel proprietor came to tell me that he had found my man.

"Have you sent for him?"

"He is here."

"When did he arrive?"

"Just now."

"Did he come from below?"

"No, sir, from the mountain."

"Impossible! I should have seen him. I have been here on the look-out for the last hour."

"This man doesn't take the ordinary paths."

"Why?"

But the host would give no further explanation. He just called loudly, "Jacques."

Jacques was a fine man, tall, muscular, in the thirties, dripping with sweat, the drops pouring down deep lines, which gave to his face an expression of strong will and endurance. He had a large, straight nose, large mouth, a forest of crisp black hair and a two days' beard. He spoke:

"You want to go to Fiery, and to climb first over the Piccolo Cervino?"

"I have renounced the idea of Cervino, unless a muleteer should arrive to-night who could take my baggage via the Cime Bianche."

"I will carry it."

"But I also want a guide for the Cervino."

"I will go with you."

"You will carry my valise up there?"

"How heavy is it?"

"About eighty-eight pounds."

"Good weight! You will give me fifteen lire."

The price was more than discreet, but the man seemed to me a braggart. I offered to shew him the valise, but he only laughed. I did not like it.

"You are a guide?"

"Certainly."

"Have you a book?"

"No, only my certificate of dismissal. I was in the artillery."

"What is your name?"

"All that for fifteen lire!"

He started laughing in a bitter tone. "Good, I will give you my name gratis. I am called Giacomo Balma. Does it satisfy you?"

On seeing that his jests did not go down with me, he changed his manner suddenly, and added, in a serious tone: "Three scudi will do me quite well, you know. To-morrow evening you will know if I have earned it." After a doubtful pause, he added: "The host tells me that you have known him some time. You might ask him about me. Salute!"

And he retired to the kitchen.

On the morrow we started at three in the morning. My expanding valise, crammed full, seemed to him like a gun. He carried it, tied by a rope, on his back, like a knapsack. He walked lightly and rapidly, whistling the march "Flick and Flock" to the time of the Bersagliere. His walk had something unusual about it. I couldn't say what it was, but I recognised that it was different from the walk of other people. Later he explained this to me. His step made no sound—he only seemed to flit over the ground. We had scarcely left when he started talking, but whether it was sleepiness, or the discomfort that his presence occasioned me, I made no reply. He tried two or three subjects, then he became silent and hastened his pace, whistling. In order to climb the Piccolo Cervino, one crosses the hill called St. Theodule—a glacier the height of which is impressed on the memory by the four threes which form the figure. It is 3333 metres high. Usually on leaving Giomen one climbs via the wooded back of the mountain and takes the glacier higher up, where it is almost smooth, and therefore less broken by crevasses. My man, however, circled the mountain by its lower slopes, until he found a gorge cut in the living rock—rough and bare as a black-board. He took this without consulting me, and clambered up it with the agility of a squirrel.

The climb in this way was certainly more interesting and expeditious, for one helped oneself with hands and knees, and every step had to be measured and studied ; thus the mind being distracted, one felt no fatigue, without counting that the accomplished labour is always in evidence, and the height gained repays the strain. In certain places it was so precipitous as to give one pause. At first Jacques, at the most difficult places, turned to give me a hand, but, being fresh, I refused the help, proud of measuring my strength with the mountain. After that, my friend took to walking on his own, and left me to my fate. Danger for life there was none, but seeing him so far in advance annoyed me. At times, intent upon my steps, I forgot him, and when I raised my head, I was displeased to find myself alone, the gorge appearing quite empty, right to the top. Where had he gone ? His appearance, the choice of this unusual path, and this mysterious disappearance—all these things raised my suspicions. It seemed certain that the hotel keeper would not have consigned me to an evil person, but this assurance did not suffice to make my mind easy. I continued climbing, and when I again raised my head there he was at his post, but far, far away and not bothering at all about me. At first I had thought that in certain places the gorge would become impracticable and that we should have to leave it, and take to it again higher up, but, proceeding by degrees, I soon recognised that the passage was always there, and also, that it even became easier the higher we went. I called out to him to stop, but my voice could not have reached him, as I shouted against the wind. If it had not been for the valise, I think I would have gone back. At last I saw him sitting on the ground awaiting me. I reached him in a bad humour. The base of the rock had become slippery through a stream of water, and he had waited to give me a hand in case of falling.

“Why did you go away ? I wish to have you near me.”

“I thought you seemed to prefer being alone, and I did not want to annoy you.”

“Why do you leave the path so often ? What are you doing roaming about ?”

"I belong to the dog race—I like to sniff around."

"Good—but don't leave me again."

"As you command."

I tried to start a conversation, but now it was he who wouldn't bite. The sun had come out, and he had taken off his coat and was carrying it over his arm. From his leather belt a hatchet was suspended, an unusual weapon for a guide.

"Why do you carry that hatchet?"

"I always carry it."

"For what reason?"

"So !" He looked fixedly at me, and added : "I also have a pistol, see——"

He took a short pistol with two barrels out of his pocket and handed it to me, warning me that it was loaded. I was tempted to keep it ; with us, in the mountains, nobody goes about armed, and pistols are weapons of luxury, reserved for joyful salvos at weddings. But I reflected that if he had meant to make a bad use of the weapon, he would not have shown it to me, and so I returned it without a word. After a quarter of an hour's walking, he said to me :

"Excuse me, I shall be back directly. You go on, I will re-join you in two minutes."

And away he went. I wanted to get rid of my doubts, so, as soon as he had gone, I followed him out of the gorge. I saw him run to a mass of great rocks about ten yards away, bend down, shift two or three great stones, moving the earth about, and then turn back. When he saw that I was watching him, he frowned and got very red, but recovered himself in a minute.

"I went to collect the bread and crust of cheese which I put there yesterday. I often roam about the mountain and place victuals in concealment." He looked me in the eyes again and added : "You don't believe me?"

No, I didn't believe him. The bread I had seen him take out of his pocket, and his uneasiness at the doubt—shewn by the fact that he had been watched—must have some reason. I

began to feel seriously uncomfortable. He took note of this, and immediately became jovial and talkative. He knew me, had asked the hotel keeper about me, knew that I was a writer—that is, a journalist, which must be a great profession for making sacks of money. He knew the life of the city and always read the papers. He also knew that I had written pieces for the theatre, another gold mine ! But if I would agree that he was all right, he would tell me stories, and make me acquainted with rascals.

“Ah, you gentry, come here for the fun of finding out what fatigue means. As if you had any idea of it ! And what one pays for a scrap of bread ! And there are people who would steal it from us, but—he touched the pistol in his pocket—here is the judge, the jury, the priest, the president, and all the powers of the earth ; and if those others want to come, they can find me.”

He had the angry and hasty manner of one who felt himself the object of a persecution, intense and persistent. He would break off in the middle of a discourse, and jump from one subject to another, as if urged on by a tremendous flow of ideas, and a fear of giving them away. He certainly had some deadly enemy who had a mysterious influence on all the acts of his life. All his talk led up to this person, and fizzled out in vague, obscure threats—expressed laughingly with clenched teeth—teeth exquisitely white, and capable of biting into a silver coin. In the depths of his eyes there quivered a timid and humble anxiety which contrasted strangely with his violent speech, but which eventually won me entirely. Of this he was also conscious, and when I offered him a cigar, he said :

“You have been thinking badly of me. I am not a rascal. Come here, and you shall know everything.”

We had come to the first snows. The gorge had widened here, and on the mountain all around there was not one blade of grass. It was one great ruin of gigantic rocks, half smothered in sandy soil, humid with newly fallen snow and the drippings from the icicles. He led me by the hand into this

labyrinth until we arrived at a kind of grotto formed by two great masses of rock, the points of which met overhead. He entered this cave on all fours, and came back carrying a package, weighing some pounds, wrapped in torn rags. Opening it, he produced cigars and tobacco. He was a smuggler.

Descending from the Swiss side, he deposited his merchandise in so many hiding places that if any were found, he would not lose all. When he had made up the parcel again, he replaced it in the hole, and returned to me with a bright and trustful face. Now that his secret had been confided to me by himself, he no longer had any fear.

"This is the highest store. The guards never come as high as this because they know that at this height there are no shepherds to give the necessary witness—and that here I command. And this is my field-lieutenant," he added, drawing a customs officer's carbine from a neighbouring crevice.

No peasant can ever be persuaded that smuggling is a culpable action. His moral sense does not reach to the notion of the artificial rights of the State. He knows that stealing and acts of violence against his neighbour are wicked, but he cannot see why it should be wrong to buy an object where it is obtainable at a low price, and dispose of it where it is well paid. The prohibition of such a natural action strikes him as intolerable tyranny, against which it is not only allowable, but actually meritorious to rebel. Out of this grows a rabid hatred of the customs guards, and the firm intention and cold-blooded capacity to shoot them if necessary. The guards know this quite well, and often it happens that if they meet a smuggler in a lonely spot—unless they happen to be in sufficient numbers, or they think the goods are of exceptional value—they act as if they had seen nothing, and pass by looking the other way. A shot is quickly fired, and at that height a corpse is easily and lastingly concealed. The guard does not return to headquarters, suspicion falls on the actual homicide. They start in companies to search the gullies for traces of the dead man, but it proves advisable not to find him.

On the high Alps there is always some convenient loop-hole for the defending lawyer.

My guide found himself, one time, unarmed, at the mercy of two customs officers and only escaped by a miracle. Another time, without being seen, he hurled a mass of great stones from a height on two customs men who were climbing up, and one of them, in making off, dropped his carbine.

"It was that carbine which I showed you," said Jacques, with a triumphant smile. "But what a life ! And the winnings are small, you know."

He described to me the night journeys in the winter—alone, in that mortal cold, laden like a mule, the snowstorm that assailed him—that whipped his blood, and held him immovable, curled up in a hollow of some rocky cliff, fearful of succumbing to the treacherous sleep of the mountain—the icy sleep, invincible advance-guard of death. Oh, he knew them, all those gaps ; step by step he had counted all the rocks, circled all the bays, had measured the openings of the crevasses, knew where the eye could catch the cord in order to draw oneself along the polished surface of the rocks, and where the rocky mountain path would give just a foothold, and where the mountain, split by the lightning and rotted by water, gives at the least weight and precipitates the deadly lavine. No guide was equal to him. He required no cord to cross the ice, or ironed tipped stick to sustain him. He measured the jumps and caught them with his eye as sure-footed as a chamois.

"And do you know why I wanted to accompany you ? I should have climbed all the same to these heights, to-day, even if you had not wanted me. Oh, don't be alarmed. I shall not smuggle in your company. I won't put you in any danger. But a relation of mine, who takes part with me in this business, has been missing for eight days. I left him at Zermatt eight days ago, and he was to have returned the next day. I only heard yesterday that he had not come back. That alarms me. It has snowed twice during these days on the peaks, and, in the summer, snow means storm. It is very

necessary that I should search for him, but I am poor and have a large family, I cannot afford to waste my days. Shall we search together, sir, will you?"

I cannot say what supplicating sweetness was in those words, "Sir, will you?"

Certainly I would, even at the cost of spending two days at it. I could climb to the Piccolo Cervino another time, for there was no use in searching the peaks.

On the glacier which, scarcely touched by the Teodulo, rises towards the Breithorn, we found traces.

"They are his," cried Jacques, "they are tracks of five or six days ago, and of one man alone. They tell me everything. I hoped he had stayed at Zermatt. If he climbed, he is dead."

We followed the tracks for over an hour, but having reached the higher level, we lost all further traces. It had snowed recently, and the snow lay pure and virgin. After having circled the whole glacier fruitlessly, towards evening we lost heart and strength. We arrived at the hotel in Fieri towards eleven. The house was quite dark and silent, but the host must have been a light sleeper, for my guide had barely called his name, when he appeared at the window and said :

"Is it you, Jacques?"

"Yes. Open."

The host, without moving, said :

"He is at the back of the house close to the hay-loft. I will come down."

Jacques, in one bound, was at the place indicated, and I followed him, feeling my way. Before the host had arrived, he had lighted a taper, and we saw a sack tied at the top, lying on a girder. It was full, but lumpy and uneven. Jacques understood—I guessed by his gesture. At that moment the host appeared.

"They brought him in this evening—the guides from Gressoney found him yesterday on the glacier of Aventino. To-day they went up with the shepherds to fetch him. To-morrow the priest will come for the last rites.

"He was seated on the snow, his feet black with gangrene.

The pain had seized him and he stopped. The frost gave him the gangrene in his feet—he had to sit down, and fell asleep.”

Jacques opened the sack, turned it down far enough to uncover the head of the dead man. He kissed him on the mouth, made the sign of the cross on his forehead with his thumb, then closed the sack and said to the host :

“Quick to supper. This gentleman is dying of hunger.”

(From “*Novelle Valdostane.*” Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

O Philosophy, come to my rescue ! You, who seeing things and events outside of us, see them in their essence, not in their relativity ;—you, who are able to find an excuse for anything, and do not wonder at anything ; O Philosophy, who has made rich the poverty of Epicurus, and happy the wealth of Seneca ; who have transformed Socrates' death into a discussion and an experiment, and the empire of Marcus into a peaceful Academy ;—O, you, who do not desert those who love you, only safe possession against the darts of fortune—come and comfort me ! From your supreme realms, imperturbably serene, you know what the world is : a mere point, an almost imperceptible point. What is mankind, then, with his petty passions ? Nay, between the flash of life and the thunder of death, where is man ?

O Philosophy, give me, if not the smile, at least the indifference of the wise. Lie, but console me. You say that there is no evil from which some good is not derived. That Nature is unceasingly and incorrigibly good. That above those dark clouds a perfectly clear sky shines : clouds will dissolve, clearness never will.

If then life seems to you, O man, a painful sigh, is not death its end ? And if death is the end of pain, why will you, O man, avoid and curse death, and deprive those whom you love of it ?

“Those whom you love !”—Yes, . . . But, would you, man, always have loved ?—Lisa was beautiful . . . but old age would have made her ugly ; Lisa was good . . . but ugliness would have made her seem wicked. If she dies now so early, she will leave you a perfect remembrance of her. So she will remain to you young and beautiful and gentle . . . and yours—for ever. Love is fed more by desires than satisfaction. We love ideals for ever because we never reach them. On the contrary, that which begins must needs cease. Is it not better, then, that she should pass away before fully satiating you, man ? And then, you are born to study. Studies require calm . . . Where can you find calm but in solitude ? Being worried by the petty family business of every day, one look at

the pot where your children expect to find their food, and another look at your literary capacity ; you would have continually wavered, utterly dissatisfied with yourself. He who does not tread one path alone does not reach any end. He who does not bend the bow of his intelligence towards an only aim will hit nothing. Be thankful to Providence, therefore, who, through the useful trial of grief, leads you again to happiness. Your books have forgiven you, and are waiting for you, ready to open again their treasures to you, to let you read again in them, between the lines and in their margins, concealed truths. What hours and days of supreme delight with those old friends, are yours ! There you are at your writing table, forming one body with it, no longer conscious of your impure flesh, which is like the fetters of the convict ; no longer conscious of that penal servitude, which is called *the world*. There you are, in fruitful embrace with another brain, generating ideas from ideas, conquering new grounds for the future, adding new rungs to the endless ladder towards God. . .

Already Henry's sobs were dying away and his eyes were glittering triumphantly. Philosophy, so much besought, was sitting on his knees, her head upon his shoulders. Now in comes the doctor with a smiling face, instead of the gloomy one of before. They look at each other in bewilderment.—“She is saved !”—cries the doctor with moved voice.—“Indeed !”—replies Henry. His voice was raucous. Was it joy ? Now, come and explain, you students of emotions.

(From “Opere.” Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

EMILIO DE MARCHI
(1852-1901)



(I)

CARLISEPPE FROM THE CORONATA

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

LETIZIA dreamed she was back again in the old days when she was nursing Don Giulio and used to press him so lovingly against her breast. She awaked.

She said to Carliseppe :

“Look here, you take Carlino with you in the donkey cart and go to Milan. Then see if you can’t find the Earl and say you’re Letizia’s husband from the Coronata farm, and tell him what’s happened. I somehow feel sure Don Giulio has nothing to do with it ; but whatever you do, don’t come back without having seen him.”

It was dreary November weather. The old vines and the yellow leaves were drenched with three days’ rain. But in spite of it Carliseppe and his son set out from the Coronata in the donkey cart. Letizia watched them from the door till they were out of sight ; then she turned back crying into the house and began cleaning her pots and pans.

Carliseppe was a perfectly ordinary tenant farmer, weather-beaten and worn ; but this was the first time hunger and need had ever knocked at his door. Carlino was the seventh son ; he was “going on twelve” and was just beginning to get weather-beaten too ; but under his clothes his skin was white as milk. So had Letizia’s been too, in her day.

“Gee up ! Get along !” Carliseppe said suddenly interrupting his train of thought. His son whipped up the donkey smartly.

The tale went that the old Earl had been so struck by the beauty of Carliseppe's wife that when Don Giulio was born, he insisted on her suckling him. That was years ago . . . let's see . . . twelve, twenty . . . twenty-six years. Deary me, how time does fly, to be sure !

They went on in the pouring rain for almost an hour in absolute silence ; they tried rather ineffectually to keep dry with an old sack that was much too small.

"Perhaps Letizia was right after all," Carliseppe thought, "The master he never see what's goin' on under his very nose, he leaves everything to the foreman and the bailiff ; they're right enough as far as they go but they do only see one side of what's goin' on."

Carliseppe was quite sure that if only he could find Don Giulio and tell him all about how there were arrears of rent to pay, he would do something about it at once and put everything straight. After all it was for Letizia's sake—and Letizia had been his nurse when he was little.

Carliseppe did not deny that he was in debt ; he would have taken the clothes off his back to pay the rent ; but there had been a whole series of bad years and now he had almost begun to think that he had some right to be excused since he had been in debt to his landlord for over six years.

"Gee up !"

The bailiff had told him last Sunday that a landlord could quite well refuse to pay what he owed to his tenants because if they did not keep up this sort of attitude they could never be sure that the peasants wouldn't go playing their old game of *non possumus*—that was what the bailiff had said.

Carliseppe had not just made a mess of things ; he had plenty of real excuses. His strongest son had turned soldier and then got married ; then Letizia was ill for months and was so obstinate, there was no means of sending her to the hospital. Finally one of the calves had died. The bailiff was quite right when he said that Carliseppe couldn't get straight again in ten years' time, and this was all the more true because he seemed to be losing his judgment rather as the years went on.

"Go on, gee up !"

So the bailiff had gone and told Sor Giacomo everything. Sor Giacomo was the agent, a wily old thing who liked good wine and pretty women even though he must have been well over forty-five. Years ago Signor Giacomo and Carliseppe had had a squabble over Letizia. It was all very well ; Signor Giacomo might be rich and everything else but Carliseppe would stand up to him in spite of it ; he was the father of a family with a reputation to keep up,—and what about the proverb that said . . .

"Gee up !"

It was not pouring with rain now ; it was much more disagreeable weather. Really streaming rain keeps you wide-awake and lively, but this sort of misty drizzle penetrates to your very bones and clings to you like a fever. When the donkey cart turned off into the Monza road, and Carliseppe looked up towards Milan between the two long rows of plane trees that line the road, he saw nothing but mist ; it looked like the end of the world.

"Lot of mud, eh ?" he said to his son.

"If it were *polenta* . . ." he said ; perhaps he meant "if it were polenta it wouldn't seem such a lot."

Carliseppe began thinking of the agent and Letizia and Don Giulio again, of his debts and his miserable harvests ; he turned these things over and over in his mind, as the slow wheels turned in the muddy road.

At last the Coronata was seven miles behind them and houses and suburbs began to appear. Then they came to the big city, whose thunder and rumble of traffic and people deafen unaccustomed ears.

The octroi officers investigated the cart and poked the donkey about. Carliseppe, wrapped up in his old sack, muttered : "Poverty pays no duties." But Carlino amended his statement : "No, it pays for everything." He seemed to be feeling philosophical just then.

They stopped in front of a great stone house that stood back in a little square. Carliseppe took the basket Letizia had

filled with eggs, jumped down from his seat, and asked the porter whether the Count was at home. He tactfully supplemented his question with a gift of four fresh eggs.

"Don Giulio is always at home to you. Will you step this way?"

Carliseppe felt reassured, and he went upstairs, pushed a door open, and stuck his head through as he asked :

"Is his Lordship in?"

"What do you want with him?" asked a fat, flabby little servant who was standing in the middle of the room with his thumbs stuck in his buttonholes.

"I wanted to speak to him about my rent, because . . ."

"He is in ; but he's not had lunch yet, and then he reads the paper and sees to his letters. And you know he doesn't like having to do with peasants . . . If you want anything, there's the office downstairs ; you can see the engineer and the lawyer and the agent, and then I'm here . . ."

The wretched creature was feeling facetious, and smiled shewing two rows of even white teeth that did not even know what it felt like to be hungry.

"Would you be so kind as to tell him it's Carliseppe from the Coronata. My wife was his Lordship's nurse . . ."

"Then what are you standing there for ? Come along with me—take off your hat ; one must respect these old pictures, you know ; we're not in the farmyard here. Then just you sit down and say a third of your rosary, and we'll tell his Lordship you're here when the time comes. Haven't you brought him anything ? What, not even a pretty little bird ?"

He looked into the empty basket and went off to the kitchen to share his joke with the cook.

Carliseppe still holding his basket, sat down on a shiny wooden seat all richly carved, with the Count's crest on the back. On the walls there were several portraits in heavy old frames whose gilding had peeled off and shewed the plaster underneath.

Carliseppe collected his thoughts for a moment ; then he went and leaned out of a window that looked over the street.

He saw Carlino who had taken the sack off his own shoulders and was spreading it affectionately over the donkey. His father was deeply moved and raised his eyes all wet with tears to the ancestral portraits around him ; perhaps none of them had ever done such a kindness—not even to a man, let alone a donkey.

It started pouring with rain again after a brief lull.

The big square hall was panelled in old oak ; a dim light filtered in through the damp windows and fell softly on the picture frames and the carving and the dull browns of the hangings. On Carliseppe's right there was a sort of wooden stand with hooks, and on this hung old garments in evil attitudes, with old hats above them ; in the dim light they looked like servants that had been hanged and left there to die. The sticks and umbrellas in the corners and the portraits of old ancestors in their lace ruffles all seemed oppressed by strange indescribable weariness ; even dead and inanimate objects were overpowered by sleep. Carliseppe would have dropped off to sleep too, but he felt too worried and restless. There was no sound in the other rooms, no voice, no steps, nothing. It seemed as if everyone was dead or gone away. There was only the sound of the rain splashing and gurgling in the gutter.

Carliseppe shut his eyes, leaned on the basket he had put on his knees, shook his head as he thought, wiped one sleeve with the other, and then went back to the window again.

His son had taken refuge in a doorway and stood there nibbling a bit of bread that had got rather wet on the journey. Poor boy, he was drenched as well.

Lunch was ready and Don Giulio went through into the dining-room. There was a blazing fire in the grate, and everything looked warm and cheerful. It was just ringing eleven when Don Giulio poured out his first glass of Bordeaux.

Don Giulio was a good fellow and all the peasants liked him because they had known him as a boy. He was not vain or miserly ; on the contrary, he spent his money freely on travelling, horses, pictures, antiques, and books, and he helped poor impecunious artists and authors. It was a sure

sign that Letizia knew him when she sent Carliseppe to see him.

Carliseppe only wanted a breathing space of six or seven months to set himself straight again.—just the time to sell two sacks of millet and to fatten up a little pig, which would sell for a hundred lire. Then his son would come back from Sicily. . . . Well, if everyone managed to have a little patience, everybody would have time to breathe. . . .

Don Giulio was still in the middle of eating his fried liver when one of his friends came in. This Marquess Annibale was a good fellow too, but rather a spendthrift, and always up to his ears in debt. He was just going off to Arabia. His parents seemed to think it would be an excellent idea ; he had an uncle who was a consul there, and he could settle things up for him or cut him off with a shilling. All Milan was talking about it and Don Giulio wanted to know all the details. His friend talked and talked ; he was rather a dear, with all his explanations and planning things out on a map. When he had done explaining he asked Don Giulio to lend him eight hundred or a thousand lire ; he would pay him back in sugar and cocoa, he said with a laugh, at the earliest possible moment.

The two friends laughed as one does laugh at twenty-five when there is no reason for crying. After a bit they began talking about Niniche, the pretty little fair woman who sang so well in French operettas ; but Don Giulio felt he was getting on ; he had just subscribed for six hundred lire's worth of shares in a society for building orphanages of which the Marchioness Eleonora was a patron.

The Marchioness had two daughters, both with a dowry of two millions ; the question was, which ? . . .

"There's a peasant from the Coronata who would like to speak to you," the servant announced.

"You know perfectly well I won't have anything to do with the estate ; send him down to the office . . . *embarras du choix*, my dear ; one is pretty but terribly disagreeable, and the other's ugly, but an absolute little angel. . . ."

While Don Giulio was talking with his fork up in the air, the Marquess emptied his plate for him. They both roared with laughter and then, to get back to business, the Count offered his friend three or four or five thousand lire, just as much as he liked ; the Marquess accepted and shook his hand, genuinely touched.

Meanwhile Carlino's little donkey stood there under the rain, and shook itself now and then and moved nearer the wall. Cabbies and 'bus drivers, (it is strange what a kind of attraction donkeys seem to have for them) flicked him with their whips as they went by. Street urchins shouted lottery numbers into his ears, just as if the poor creature hadn't got them long enough to hear that he'd been born to be a laughing-stock. Carlino took everyone's remarks as personal insults to the Count and himself ; but he was so afraid of the big noisy city and its inhabitants that instead of throwing stones at them as he would have done at home, he struggled silently to keep back his tears.

The servant came back and informed Carliseppe that his Lordship would have nothing to do with the peasants. He had engineers and people paid to do the work ; he wanted to be left alone. Why, if he had to listen to everyone there'd be a procession to his house every day ! He reminded him to take care of the pence and the pounds will take care of themselves ; and that the best thing to do was to go and have it out with Sor Giacomo.

"But Sor Giacomo won't listen, he only gives me notice to leave at Martinmas," sobbed the poor old man.

"His Lordship quite agreed with Sor Giacomo. You either trust people or you don't."

"But my children . . ."

"Even if you were the pope, it wouldn't make any difference. Of course what the agent says must be right. You ought to be old enough to know that."

A loud ring at the bell interrupted them and the servant dashed off precipitately.

Carliseppe's eyes filled with tears ; but he set his mouth

firmly and tried hard to overcome his anger and disappointment. If he had been the only person concerned he would have gone off then and there to die in lower Lombardy or by the wayside ; he was so old and worn it didn't matter.

For years Providence seemed to have dealt him blow after blow. But his wife and children . . . They had all been born in the same little village, under the shadow of the hills ; their fathers were buried in the same churchyard. And then when generations and generations, father and son and father and son, have ploughed the same land for more than two hundred years, you get to know the land and to love it dearly. Every hedge and bush and hollow has its story to tell ; your children grow up and flourish like the grass and the clover, and when you care for the earth it is like caring for your children.

So poor Carliseppe thought, in rather muddled sequence, as he leaned with his arms on his basket. When he looked out of the window he seemed to see the donkey and cart far, far away as if they were going to fade away into the distance ; perhaps it was the driving rain or perhaps it was his tears.

The bells were chiming mid-day ; just the time when Letizia dishes up the soup at home. She must be thinking about them now, feeling quite proud of having given them such good advice. She was sure that her foster child Don Giulio would never have wronged his nurse. After all a nurse is almost like a mother ; in fact when Letizia thought of the poor pale whiny Countess, she felt she was more than Don Giulio's mother. No ; Carliseppe would never go home without having seen the Count.

His rambling train of thought led him back to the day (twenty-six years ago) when he had taken Letizia to Milan for the first time for her to suckle the Count's son. What a splendid creature she was then ! Why, she could have suckled fifty Counts' sons easily ! People said the little boy had bow legs when he was born ; but look what a fine young man he was now ! The whole house was rejoicing then, and the old Count cried like a baby, and when he had met Carliseppe at the foot of the stairs he had said : "I know Letizia's good and

strong : that's splendid !” There were carriages and fine gentlemen coming and going all day. At last it was time to go, time to say good-bye to Letizia. Her eyes were swollen with crying when she went to the door to see him off. “Patience, Iseppe,” she said—it was on this same door step, but even that seemed older after all these years. “We shall get rich all right like this. After, we shan’t have to worry about anything, he’s such a kind gentleman, he is, a real gentleman. Good-bye, Iseppe.”

They had dressed her already in white, with golden pins in her hair and a lovely filigree necklace. She looked like a Madonna, . . . Carliseppe felt his heart would break as he went back all alone to the Coronata,—twenty-six years ago. But it was much worse now if he had to go away without even seeing the young gentleman.

When he saw that no one was coming and realised that they had left him there for good and all, he plucked up courage and opened one of the doors. He saw another room, all upholstered in leather and with a kind of gallery with gilded carving : it looked rather like a church. He looked in ; no one there. He called, very respectfully and gently :

“Sor Conte, please help me ! I am Carliseppe from the Coronata.”

No one answered. There was no one there except an armoured lay figure close to the wall. Carliseppe pulled out his blue cotton handkerchief and wiped his eyes ; then he took up his basket again and went back into the hall, dragging his feet that seemed as heavy as lead all of a sudden. He felt as if he were lost in the midst of a vast unknown desert. When he looked out of the window, he saw that a crowd had collected round his little cart ; and there was Carlino, struggling to get away from a policeman.

Whatever had happened ? Carliseppe forgot all about waiting and rushed out to see. It appeared that a street urchin had thrown a petard that had exploded just between the donkey’s legs. Carlino had seized him by the hair and the two boys were fighting in the midst of a little group of people who had

come up to see what the matter was, and were roaring with laughter at it all.

Carliseppe rescued his son and followed by the crowd, went as far as an inn near by. There he ordered some food for himself and the donkey ; and after scolding Carlino for not behaving himself, he went back to the Count's house just as Signor Giacomo was coming out.

"I was just wanting to see you. His Lordship has just signed the new deeds ; you'll have to clear out by Martinmas."

"But he can't have allowed . . ."

"You'd better go and grumble to the Count then . . ."

And Signor Giacomo went off to lunch.

Carliseppe, crying like a baby, tried to melt the porter's heart ; couldn't he persuade the Count to see him ?

"His Lordship is out," he answered shortly. He did not seem as friendly as he had done ; perhaps the eggs had disagreed with him. "He is out ; he'll be having dinner in the town too."

"Where could I find him ?"

"I don't know—he might be at his ordinary club or at the fencing club . . ."

It was raining so hard that it had got quite dark. Carliseppe went out into the middle of the Square and looked down to the right, down a long, long grey street, with streams of people hurrying to and fro under umbrellas. Underfoot it was terribly muddy ; there were puddles everywhere.

He looked at his left where there was a shorter street with a church at the end. Somewhere a tinker was hammering monotonously on a cauldron, and mist hung heavily above the wet roofs.

Wherever could he find the Count, in such a big place as Milan ? Was it just the servant who said he was out, when he really hadn't announced him ? or could it be that Sor Giacomo had deceived him and just given the Count the deeds to sign without saying what they were about ? Carliseppe could swear (and so could we) that Don Giulio knew nothing about it. Isn't that one of the privileges of being rich—never knowing anything about anything ?

But it was no good wasting time. He had better go and look for the man who had told him about that place in lower Lombardy ; and then he had to go back to the Coronata and ask Letizia's advice and share his troubles with the family.

"Gee up !"

For an hour the two peasants ambled along towards the Coronata, wrapped up in their wet sacks. They were shaken about by the wheels that kept sinking into the mud and jolting on the stones ; then sometimes the donkey stopped and looked at itself in a puddle, and the old man would break off his train of thought and shout, "Gee up !"

The donkey knew his voice and went on again.

Carlino did not dare to say a word, his father's face was so overcast. Anyhow he was too angry to want to speak. He felt like setting fire to Milan and burning it to the ground, but he decided that he would throw stones at any horse he met instead.

"Gee up !"

It would be awful, going down to the Bassa where you can't even see the hills, all down among the frogs and the snakes, with people he didn't know, and just earning wages. He wouldn't get enough to eat and he'd get ill with fever and die of pellagra. It wasn't a bit true that places are really all alike ; Carliseppe much preferred his own home and his own churchyard.

They had passed Cinisello and the old Bettola. The sound of an *Ave Maria* was heard in the distance. Over the Ticino the cold sad day was dying ; its last leaden gleams silhouetted the dark poplars and birches. Now and then the flame of a homestead fire lit up the dusk, and the smoke hung heavy on the misty air.

When Carlino heard a dog bark—wasn't that the mill dog ?—he looked up and saw the dark roofs of the Coronata ; the old man who had gone to sit in the back of the cart, was still calculating what to do next.

The donkey stopped all of a sudden.

"Tell him to get along." Carlino said he could not make the donkey obey him.

"Gee up !" the old man said, rousing himself from his dreams.

Five minutes later they got out at the Coronata. Letizia was waiting for them at the door. She knew at once it was no good asking questions ; she ran to her bedroom and began to weep. Carliseppe sat all huddled up near the fire where the soup was cooking over the flames. The boy sat on the floor with his back to the fire. And the fire sank slowly untended.

What do they care about their fire now ? It isn't theirs any longer ; the house belonged to their ancestors but it doesn't belong to them ; it is still their village, but they cannot stay and die there. Another fireside awaits them, perhaps left empty for the same reason as theirs, and another house with no tradition but the tradition of endless poverty, and an unknown village with a different church and a different churchyard with so few graves . . . many too few. There's only a common trench for the hospital and . . . Good-bye.

(II)

BUREAUCRACY

(Translated by ——)

LETTER I.

Ref. 3A/3.A/25

Post Office,
Castagnazzo.

5 April, 1890.

To the Honourable the District Postmaster,
District Post Office,
Broccasecca.

Sir,

Re *Rats*.

Whereas this Post Office is at present suffering grave inconvenience from rats which come from the neighbouring canal and enter these premises destroying papers, letters and

even clothing ; and whereas traps of various descriptions distributed with the utmost skill and discrimination, and poisoned food of different kinds ingeniously spread about, have alike proved to be of no avail ; the sub-postmaster has decided to procure two cats, which, being the natural enemies of the above-mentioned animals, will be able, since they will remain in the office especially during the night, by their presence and vigilance to frighten away or to destroy the dangerous rodents. For this purpose he begs leave to apply to the District Department of the Post Office for an adequate grant for the acquisition and subsequent maintenance of the two cats aforementioned until such time as this cause of damage shall have been removed or eradicated.

(Signed) PACCHIOTTI,
Sub-Postmaster.

LETTER II.

Ref. 545B/671/844

District Post Office,
Broccasecca,
20 April, 1890.

To the Honourable the Provincial Postmaster General,
Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan.

Sir,
Re *Rats and Cats.*

The Sub-Postmaster of Castagnazzo, belonging to this postal district, informs us by his 3A/3.A/25 dated 5/4/90, that an invasion of rats from the neighbouring canal is causing considerable damage to papers, letters, clothing and furniture in the post office of the above-mentioned town. An application has therefore been directed to this District Office for transmission to the Provincial Department in order to obtain prompt relief or at least a pecuniary grant *ad hoc* for the local purchase and maintenance of two feline animals rendered necessary by the present emergency and the urgent condition of affairs.

(Signed) BALOSSI,
For the District Postmaster Broccasecca

LETTER III.

Ref. 567494/278944 C.C./27945.

Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan,

30 May, 1890

To His Excellency,
The Minister for Royal Posts and Telegraphs,
Rome.

Your Excellency,

Re *Cats and Rats*.

May it please Your Excellency that the Sub-Postmaster of the Post Office of Castagnazzo (District of Broccasecca in this Province) has reported through the usual channels that papers and correspondence, as well as money orders and personal effects, have been frequently damaged and even destroyed in that office by incursions of rats, coming apparently from the neighbouring canal. In order that this inconvenience and risk to His Majesty's mails may be eliminated, I have the honour to beg Your Excellency that orders may be given for an inspection by experts of the office afore-mentioned, and that Your Excellency will in the meantime authorise that office, and enable it by a pecuniary grant *ad hoc*, to procure and maintain two cats which shall be on the establishment of that Post Office.

I am informed that a grant of 70 (seventy) lire will be adequate for this purpose, and that it is expected that such grant will be non-recurrent.

I have the Honour to remain,

Your Excellency's Obedient Servant,

(Signed) PASQUALIGNO,

Provincial Postmaster General, Milan.

LETTER IV.

Ref. 444894/2496. AA.B./4894215.

Your 567494/278944 CC./27945. d/30.5.90.

Ministry of Royal Posts and Telegraphs,
Rome,

27 June, 1890.

To the Honourable the Provincial Postmaster General,
Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan.

Sir,

Re Grant for Feline Animals.

I have given orders to the Technical Department of this Ministry to make arrangements for an inspection in the near future of the Post Office of Castagnazzo in order that the inconvenience referred to in the above-mentioned letter may be removed as soon as possible. I have, at the same time, authorised a special grant of the sum of 70 (seventy) lire to be added to the annual endowment of the Post Office of Castagnazzo (District of Broccasecca, Province of Milan) for the purpose of the acquisition and maintenance of 2 (two) cats. This sum will be paid by special money order by the office of the Royal Treasury at Milan. The Director of the Provincial Post Office will take care to enclose the justificative documents with his annual report for the current year.

(Signed) PECORA,

For his Majesty's Minister of Posts and Telegraphs.

LETTER V.

Royal Treasury, Milan.

14 July, 1890.

To the Honourable,
The Provincial Postmaster General,
Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan.

I beg leave to announce to the Provincial Postal Department that this office has received a money order for 70 lire payable to Mr. Cats.

(Signed) BOTOLA,

Cashier for the Chief Cashier.

LETTER VI.

Director's Department,
Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan.
20 July, 1890.

To the Honourable,
The Chief Cashier,
Royal Treasury,
Milan.

Sir,

Ref. Your Letter dated 14th inst. (copy enclosed).

Mr. Cats, to whom you refer and for whom we have received a money order for 70 (seventy) lire is unknown at this office.

May I call your attention, however, to the fact that the sexennial increase of salary now due to Sir N. Ratts has not yet been paid to him. Will you kindly ascertain whether any mistake has been made?

(Signed) SALA,
Director, Provincial Postal Department, Milan.

LETTER VII.

Milan,
July 21st.

Dear Sala,

The money order says "Cats"; as for Sir N. Ratts, I should be much obliged if you will ask him personally to write me an official letter.

I'm just off to lunch ; roti de veau and spaghetti !

Yours sincerely,

BOTOLA.

LETTER VIII.

Director's Department,
Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan.

1 August, 1890.

To His Excellency,

The Minister for Royal Posts and Telegraphs,
Rome.

Your Excellency,

Information has reached my department that a money order for 70 (seventy) lire, made payable to a Mr. Cats is lying at the office of His Majesty's Treasury in this town. This Mr. Cats is alleged to belong to this Post Office. There appears, in my opinion, to have been some confusion of names, as the sexennial increase of salary due since last June to our distinguished Deputy Cashier, Sir N. Ratts, has not yet been paid to him. I have the honour to communicate these facts to Your Excellency and beg that you will verify and, if necessary, rectify the situation.

I have the honour to remain, Your Excellency,

Your Excellency's most obedient humble servant,

(Signed) SALA,

Provl. Director Posts & Tel., Milan.

LETTER IX.

Ref. 15/24CC/24875

Technical Department,
Provincial Head Post Office,
Milan,

3 August, 1890.

To the Honourable,

The District Postmaster,
Broccasecca.

Sir,

Re Repairs.

The Provincial Technical Department of the Post Office hereby authorises the District Office of Broccasecca, according

to the report of 20 April last, to order an enquiry at the Post Office of Castagnazzo (belonging to that Postal District) and to forward without delay an estimate of the expenses likely to be incurred in the removal from the aforesaid office of the inconvenience complained of in the previous report.

(Signed) VIRGOLA,
Provl. Chief Engineer, P. & T., Milan.

LETTER X.

Ref. 555 B/915/916.

District Post Office,
Broccasecca,
14 August, 1890.

To the Sub-Postmaster,
Castagnazzo.

VERY URGENT.

Sir,

Re Repairs.

The Director of this District begs to inform you that, by order of the Technical Department of Royal Posts and Telegraphs an inspection of your office will take place during Thursday and Friday of next week. The engineers, Sir C. Cardone and Sir P. Tarocco, will conduct the inspection with a view to providing as soon as possible, for the repair works mentioned in your 3A/3.A/25, dated 5/4/90.

(Signed) PRETOLA,
For the District Director of Royal P. & T., Broccasecca.

XI.

Telegram.

Director, Post Office, Milan.

Cats is appointed Castagnazzo order payment Ratts.

MINISTER, R.P. & T.

* * *

And so on—*ad libitum*.

(From "Storie d' Ogni Colore." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

MATILDE SERAO

(1856-1927)



(I)

IN AN OLD NEAPOLITAN STREET

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

STANDING beside the great stone parapet, Vicenzella held a large grey cuttlefish firmly in one hand, while with the other she cut its tentacles into small pieces, working away briskly with a fine sharp little knife. Near her, on the ground, a brown earthenware cooking-pot was boiling on a small fire built up on yellow sandstone. It contained salt water, and very strong red pepper ; every now and then Vicenzella threw into it a handful of little pieces of cuttlefish—grey skin and white pulp. When she had cut it all up, and put it in to boil in the salt water, she added some very hard ships-biscuit, and shut the lid down tightly. With an instinctive movement she shuffled herself more securely into her wooden shoes, which had high clacking heels, and approached Maria-Grazia the water-seller, who was swinging the large closed can of sulphur-water to and fro, while her left foot rocked the basket below her, in which her baby was sleeping.

“Would you be so kind Mariagrà, as to give me a glass of water ?”

“You would like some water ? Here, my girl.”

Vicenzella did not drink the water, but poured it over her hands, drying them on her blue cotton apron.

“That cuttlefish stinks,” she murmured, “and Ciccillo cannot bear a nasty smell.”

“Is he so genteel ?”

"After all, he is a gentleman, Mariagrà, you know."

"Ciccillo is not for you, Vicenzella, take the advice of one who wishes you well."

"Ciccillo is to be my husband," replied Vicenzella shortly.

"Your little one is growing fatter every day, God bless her."

"The flies are devouring her, poor Canitella," and she bent down to drive them away from her face.

Vicenzella returned to the little fire, and seated on a chair which was propped up against the wall to prevent it from slipping, she watched over the cooking of the cuttlefish, taking the lid off the pot every now and then, to plunge a two-pronged fork into it. She sat there in silence, her proud brown eyes looking down the sunlit old street, the Via Santa Lucia. It was full of people and carriages, and the trams passed along it every minute. She started to darn a hole in the heel of one of her blue stockings. Then Gennarino, the pastry-cook came up, carrying on his arm a large tin tray, on which were placed in a circle some slices of *pizza*, a cake which savoured of tomato and marjoram.

"Oh Vicè ! is the cuttlefish cooked ?"

She pretended not to hear ; her large and expressive mouth was severe, her black eyebrows had a stubborn frown, and no cajolery could melt her haughty eyes.

"If you will give me a bit of cuttlefish, Vicè, I will give you a slice of *pizza*."

"I am not hungry, and the cuttlefish is not cooked."

"I bet that if Ciccillo were to come along, the cuttlefish would be cooked. Miracles happen for him. . . ."

"All right, that's enough."

"How unkind you are Vicè !"

"Who asks you to talk to me ? Go along, be off with you."

Gennarino suppressed a gesture of rage, and went off crying his wares, extolling the savour and the excellence of his *pizze*. Vicenzella continued to mend her stocking placidly, amidst the turmoil and uproar of the street, looking round every now and then, as if expecting someone. A fat woman with a black woollen jacket, a white apron, and a red kerchief round her

neck, came up to her, clutching a handful of money. A little girl was clinging to her skirt.

"Here is the key, Vicè, and here is Fortuna. Look after the house, and take care of the little one."

"Yes, Ma," she said, without moving.

"I don't know when I shall be back. I have to go as far as Porta Capuana to ask Ciccillo's mother for the money she owes me."

Vicenzella flushed, and her voice trembled for a moment.

"Don't be unkind to her, Ma," she said in a low voice.

"Business is one thing, and love is another," said the usuess severely, jingling the coins. "Ciccillo eats up all his mother's wages."

"You could never abide him, Ma," answered Vicenzella, looking down and lowering her voice to restrain her anger.

"And he eats up all of yours, too."

"It is nothing to do with you. You are not my mother. Once a stepmother, always a stepmother, as they say."

"Well, we shall see," Gesualda replied quietly, not wishing to quarrel in the open street. "I leave this creature in your charge."

The fat billowy woman went off slowly, her double chin protruding over her red kerchief. Vicenzella, who was still white with suppressed rage, had stopped mending her stocking.

"Oh ! Vicè, Vicè," cried the little girl, seizing her skirt. "Tell me a story !"

"I am not in the mind for it, Fortune, let me be."

"Yes, yes, do tell me about the *Bella Moriana*."

"Listen, Fortuna, if you will be good, your sister will give you a *soldo* and you can buy yourself something nice."

"What shall I buy ?"

"A *soldo* of roasted nuts, you get such a lot !"

"No, no."

"A *soldo* of coffee."

"No, no."

"A *soldo* of Indian figs, you get three."

"Yes, yes, give it to me."

And Fortuna ran off towards the far end of the Via Santa Lucia to buy herself some of those fresh but insipid figs for a *soldo*. Vicenzella looked up towards the *Gigante*. Her brown face, suffused with red, showed no trace of a smile.

"Vicè," said Aniello, the sailor, "Give me a bit of charcoal to light my pipe."

"Here, kid," said Vicenzella, lifting the pot.

Aniello was bare-legged and barefoot, clad simply in a pair of short trousers of white cloth, and a shirt, worn over them like a blouse; one could see his hairy brown chest. There was no top to the crown of his large straw hat. He had come up from the shore of Santa Lucia, from the Baths, where he played the sailor, that is to say, he was bathing-attendant.

"Where's Gesualda?" said he.

"She has gone to ask for her money."

"And Fortuna?"

"She has gone to buy a *soldo* of fruit."

"I am surprised that Don Ciccillo is not here," said Aniello.

"He must be bathing with that girl."

"What girl, kid?"

"Don't you know? My friend Gaetano, of the *Sole* Baths, told me that yesterday Don Ciccillo came there with a girl, a pretty girl with a shawl, who wears her hair in a fringe."

"It can't be."

"Why do you say that it can't be? Gaetano is not mad."

"No, he is not mad, but what he said to you, kid, cannot be."

"He saw it with his own eyes."

"Then St. Lucy cannot have given him good eyesight. What he said to you can't be."

"Oh, go on! You are an ass."

The bathing attendant went off down the steps to the sea-shore. Vicenzella shook her head, as though nothing could have convinced her, but she chafed with impatience, and as she looked up towards the *Gigante*, she mechanically plunged the little fork into the pot in which the cuttlefish was cooking in the salt water.

It was eleven o'clock, and the Via Santa Lucia was steeped

in sunshine. Vicenzella was no longer moving about. Fortuna was sitting on the ground close beside her, dozing. As the hour of noon approached, the sale of the stewed cuttlefish began. Vicenzella had put three or four saucers of white earthenware on the parapet at the side of the street : as soon as a customer presented himself she would plunge the fork into the pot, and would draw out a piece of bubbling cuttlefish and put it in the saucer, adding a piece of ships-biscuit, now softened, and a spoonful of brown broth. The customer would stand chattering, while he ate the savoury and tender fragment of cuttlefish with his fingers ; then he would put the saucer to his lips, and drink the broth. A single portion cost two *soldi*, and a double portion four *soldi*. Vicenzella measured out each portion fairly, she never hesitated, nor lost her head ; at one time she had around her two or three bricklayers, who were working in the Via Chiatamone, an oyster-seller, and a tram conductor. She worked quickly, with a very serious expression, paying no attention to the words of those who were trying to flirt with her, shrugging her shoulders with a movement of haughtiness or contempt, as she dropped the coins into the pocket of her apron. By the time Franceschella, who sold sulphur-water, came up to spend two *soldi* on a portion of cuttlefish, there was none left.

"It is just this moment finished," said Vicenzella, showing her the pot, in which there remained only a little broth.

"You have had a good day then ?"

"Very good."

"You are lucky. With this fear of illness—may God deliver us from it !—no one is buying sulphur-water any more. We are not doing anything—although I have promised an offering to the Madonna of the Rosary if she will prosper me with a good season. What can one do ? I shall not be able to marry this year either."

"But Carluccio is still soldiering, isn't he ?"

"He will be till Christmas, then he comes back. He has written me a letter. Ciccillo has not done his soldiering, has he ?"

"No, the Government will not take him, he is the only son of a widow."

"When are you going to marry?"

"We have not enough money," said Vicenzella with profound melancholy.

"Don't you make any?"

"I make some, yes."

"Well then?"

"And then it goes. It can't be helped."

"Oh! what bad luck. Well, as you have no more cuttlefish, I must go and spend my two *soldi* on fried fish."

Vicenzella covered over her fire, and washed the saucers and the cooking-pot in an earthenware jar on the pavement, then she put them to dry in the sun on the great parapet. Having passed her hands over her hair, she stood counting the money that she had made, and prepared to go.

"Vicenzè, I am coming with you," murmured her little sister.

"Yes, yes," said Vicenzella impatiently, putting the money back into her pocket.

But just then a foppish young man stopped in front of Vicenzella.

"By your leave," said he, touching his wide-brimmed hat.

"At your service, Pascali."

"I come on an embassy."

"Has Ciccillo sent you?"

"Yes. He sends you his very kindest regards, and wishes you to know that he has not been able to come because some of his friends have invited him to a tavern, where they are having a party. He is there now, and he asks you whether you will be so good as to send him a couple of *lire*, because he does not wish to cut a poor figure, and he sends you all sorts of greetings, and asks me to say that he will be here in less than half-an-hour."

"Here are the two *lire*, Pascali."

"I wish you good-day, and thank you."

"Ciccillo is coming."

"He will be here in half-an-hour."

"Remember me to him, Pascali ; ask him to excuse me if I give him nothing but copper."

"It does not matter."

Pasqualino went off, his shoes creaking, and she remained thoughtful for a moment. Then, following her little sister, she crossed the road, opened a little door in the *basso* of a house, and brought out a small basket and a little bench. Fortuna carried the bench for her, and they recrossed the road and returned to their place on the pavement. Holding the bench in front of her, and crouching down on the ground, Vicenzella took the green walnuts out of the basket, and hammered on them rapidly with a piece of wood, to break open the shells. From these there oozed gallic acid, which stained Vicenzella's fingers brown, as she made the little piles of six or a dozen nuts, six for a *soldo*, cracked open, so that the white pith could be seen.

"Give me a nut, Vicenzè."

"Here."

Having cracked them all, she put the bench in front of her chair and sat down. She looked up in the direction of the *Gigante* to see if Ciccillo were coming. The sale of nuts went slowly at first : a servant girl from the neighbourhood came, demanded eight for a *soldo*, and ran them down, as being either musty or tasteless.

"Well, why do you come here ?" asked Vicenzella savagely.

"Go and bury yourself !"

"As for you, I should like to see you dead !" exclaimed the servant girl, going off.

An old pauper, on the other hand, spent two *soldi* on them, without disputing the number, but he chose them one by one, undoing the little piles. Vicenzella built them up again patiently, asking herself whether the half-hour were up. The children were just coming out of the little school kept by Don Ferdinando, the ex-Bourbon captain. It must therefore be three o'clock. The little ones surrounded Vicenzella's stall, screaming and stamping, while she tried to pacify them, and

to stop their impatient hands. One little boy, in particular, wanted two *centesimi* of nuts, and had set his heart on getting four nuts for the money ; and he cried, sobbing, and clutching his two *centesimi* convulsively. She gave them to him, and he went off leaping and skipping. A streak of shade was already lengthening in the Via di Santa Lucia, and the throng of people gradually increased ; and on Vicenzella's face also there fell a slight shadow. She had sold all the nuts, even a pile of musty ones, and now remained inert, with her hands under her apron, never losing sight of the slope of the *Gigante*, whence Ciccillo was to come. Fortuna had just gone to play with the little girl of Maria-Grazia, the water-seller, when a woman came up to Vicenzella. She was a dark, thin little woman wearing a necklace of red coral, and a yellow cotton dress.

"Good-morning, Vicè," she said, putting an empty hamper down on the ground.

"You have been delivering the washing ?"

"Yes, I am just returning to Porta Capuana."

"Were you paid ?"

"What do you suppose ? Just fancy ! I gave the lady the wrong chemise, and she would not pay. It really is maddening. You see I promised that poor brother of mine, Ciccillo, who is so good, that this evening I should make him a certain dish of macaroni, with anchovy and oil, of which he is very fond. What a nuisance. Now he'll have bread and water."

"Is he so very fond of it ?"

"Yes, very."

"Here are twenty *soldi*, Carmela, get the macaroni for him."

"No, what are you doing ? If he hears of it he will scold me. I won't take them."

"Do me this favour, take them and don't tell him. It really is a pleasure to me."

"Very well, but I will pay you back."

"Yes, yes, so long as you take them now. Ask him to come to us afterwards, this evening, if he cares to do so."

"I'll tell him. I'll tell him."

Carmela too, disappeared, with a rapid step, carrying the empty linen hamper on her hip. The glow of the sunset was already on the sea and the street, but Ciccillo had not appeared, nor did he do so. Gesualda had returned, walking like a fat goose, her fist full of money : she had taken Fortuna with her, and had gone home to cook some supper. The little girl now came to seek four *soldi* from Vicenzella, for her step-mother.

"I have not got them."

"What do you mean by saying you haven't got them?" shouted her stepmother, her hands on her hips.

She came out into the street.

"Give me four *soldi*, Vicenzè."

"I haven't got them."

"It is not true, liar."

"I haven't got them, and if I had I shouldn't give them to you."

"Yes, so that you might give them to that dolt, that beggar, that sponge ! Now he is making love to a dressmaker."

"It isn't true."

"His mother told me."

"It isn't true."

"Well, you will see for yourself."

"If I see it I shall not believe it."

"I'll tell you what ! Those who give me nothing shall eat nothing. To-day there will be nothing for you to eat."

"I shall eat nothing."

"You are a great lazy beggar like your mother, good soul."

"If you don't go away I shall measure my shoe on your head, Ma."

"You are capable of anything, but nothing shall you eat this evening."

And so, a little later, Gesualda sent Fortuna to call for her father at the Baths, and all three of them sat down round a large dish of macaroni. Vicenzella came in and out, preparing things for the evening.

"Why isn't Vicenzella eating ?" asked her father.

"She isn't hungry" said Gesualda briefly.

"I am not hungry," said Vicenzella.

And she went out. She had brought back to the house all the utensils which she had used for the sale of the cuttlefish and the walnuts. Then she had taken over to her usual place a little earthenware firepan, in which some small pieces of charcoal were burning. On the fire she had put some ears of Indian corn, which were roasting with a keen and appetising smell. Automatically Vicenzella fanned the fire with a paper fan. She gazed into the shadows more fixedly than ever, to see whether he whom she had been awaiting since the morning would appear. She paid no attention to the ravenous fishermen, who came to buy the roasted ears of corn, two for a *soldo*, nor to the words of Maria-Grazia the water-woman, who supped off the corn for a *soldo*, and told her to let Ciccillo be. She had no more peace now, and the various things that she had heard spoken against her lover since the morning came back into her mind, in all their vileness and cruelty. A party of students, bent on carrying out a wager, came to her for some ears of corn; they made a circle round the fire while waiting for them to roast, and tried to joke with Vicenzella, who looked at them without answering, and was very grim, almost savage. But all at once, a fleeting vision passed before her eyes: she seemed to see, in a tram, Ciccillo, her own Ciccillo, sitting beside a girl with a black shawl, and a fringe of fair hair on her forehead. And thinking no more of the corn, which was getting burnt, nor of the waiting students, she began to run after the tram, as though she were insane, clutching in her pocket the sharp little knife which she had used for the cuttlefish that morning. But the tram went on: and the passers-by stopped to look at this poor woman who was following it. When she reached Piazza Vittoria the tram stopped, so that the passengers might alight. A young man and a girl descended from it, and went off holding hands, up the great moonlit street. Cautiously, fiercely, Vicenzella followed them; they went on slowly, close together, as if lost to all but love. In her agony a red mist rose before Vicen-

zella, and maddened her ; she could not control herself. She overtook them and thrust them apart.

"You brute ! You coward !" she howled like a wild animal.

"Well ?" said Ciccillo very coldly, "What is it ?"

She did not answer, but looked at him, her eyes rolling wildly.

"Go home at once," he commanded.

"Yes, Yes. . . I am going. I am going at once," . . . she sobbed imploringly, as she went away out of sight. . . .

(II)

A NICE PROFESSION

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

W H O in the world was Enrico Joanna ? Above all things he was a poet ; and the heart of a poet has always a greater and more powerful genius for affection than have those of other men.

At the age of eight he made a composition in verse, all by himself, to wish his mother a happy Christmas. You can imagine that he was the favourite, the kissed and petted darling of the household. The very naughtinesses of this child, spoilt as he was by too much love, had always an eminently poetic side, which touched his parents. Naturally he suffered much at school, and though he relieved his feelings by writing satires against his masters, who were fond of him, he returned home pale and ill. The contact with the other children, who were so vulgar and stupid, and the too severe studies, were not suited to his tender and delicate spirit. They kept him at home, and while one of his brothers was at the School of Navigation, and another destined for the Technical Institute, he was able to find leisure for his genius in the tranquil and somnolent paths of literature. He wrote letters to them in Alexandrines, exhorting them to study and to steel their

minds in the discipline of those exact sciences ; and he lamented that he could not also devote himself to a serious profession, but he knew that his poet's heart would have been crushed by such a hateful business.

"Enrico has an exceptional nature"—said his friends and acquaintances, shaking their heads and assuming an air of mystery.

Indeed, he was always pale and sad. His father and mother adored him, though a little alarmed by the singular strength of his spirit, and by the deep affection which was the foundation of it. They realised that he was irritated by the rather *bourgeois* atmosphere of his home, and they felt humble about it, and thought : Who can understand him here ? But Enrico would console them kindly and gently, and assure them that on the contrary he was very well off, and very happy there ; but his forced and feeble smile would contradict these words. He used voluntarily to shut himself up in his room, for hours at a time, and walk up and down, now silently, with bent head, now declaiming verses aloud. At these times no one dared disturb him upon any pretext whatsoever, they crept about the house, and visitors were asked to lower their voices, for Enrico was composing verses. At night he used to remain awake. His mother would get out of bed and go bare-footed to listen anxiously at his keyhole.

"My son, why are you not asleep ?"

"I can't sleep, mother," he would reply in a hollow voice.

His mother would weep. Then for her sake, only for her sake, he made a great sacrifice and went to sleep. She always returned to her room full of tenderness towards her son for his infinite kindness. He alone knew how to love : when a fine young fellow died, who had been a friend of his childhood, he wrote a beautiful poem, full of melancholy, which was published too, in one of the smaller literary journals. He had a sparrow which he had trained to fly about the house. One day, absent-mindedly, he squashed it with his foot. He was in despair for a week, they had to comfort him and send him away to the country : there he wrote an agonised poem on the

death of the sparrow. The other children of the family, the two little girls and the two young men, were of common clay, neither good nor bad, doing their duty in their own way ; but all four of them recognised the superiority of their brother's sentiments. He assumed a majestic mien, but sought to eclipse his light, and abase himself, that he might not humiliate the others by comparison with his own talent and his own goodness. He read. He read a great deal, now scientific books, now works of literature, but he was disgusted with all the writers, who did not know, as he did, how to think, and how to feel.

His first love was his sister's governess, a young English girl, who fell deeply and sincerely in love with him. Enrico wrote sonnets to her, and spoke to her of his ineffable sorrows, and she grieved over the woeful lot of the poor poet, and this compassion of hers was very great, nay too great ; so much so that his mother dismissed the governess, who, on this account, also lost many other pupils. He was ready to die of a broken heart. He had not the strength to see the girl again, but spoke of suicide, and wrote verses which could not be read without tears. The whole household was miserable, they gave one another anxious looks, fearing disaster. The young man loved too deeply and too passionately ; his hyper-sensitive temperament needed strengthening. His family, who were not very rich, made a painful effort, and gave him a thousand *lire*, so that he might make a short voyage. The parting was an indescribable spectacle ; they all wept, except Enrico. But as everyone knows, the greatest sorrows can find no vent in tears. He remained grim. In the train he composed a lyric, in which he poured out his grief, and sent it to his parents, and to a Literary Journal.

From the countries which he visited he wrote very melancholy letters, saying that he was dying of home-sickness, that he wanted to return to the circle of his dear ones. At home his letters were read aloud, and when the pathetic parts were reached they all had tears in their eyes. In the meantime he did not return, since, on account of his growing fame, he was

entertained everywhere by people who wished to know him. Though still young, glory came to meet him, and kissed him on the brow.

On his return, a great passion, a requited passion for a married lady of patrician birth, enhanced his reputation still further. The lady compromised herself on his account, in the most dreadful manner, but, for a poet, for a man who knew how to love as he did, even a princess of the blood would be ready to compromise herself. A still greater scandal was caused by a little book of verses, a poem wherein was related in thrilling tones, the moving history of this passion, which the poet had written with his heart's blood, as an offering to his divinity ! Her name was not given, but the allusion was so clear that the edition was sold off rapidly, the gossip was terrific, and owing to the uproar caused by the affair, the quiet husband was obliged to ask for a separation ; one of the two sons went to his father, the other to his mother, and a family was disrupted and destroyed. Enrico, though full of grief, submerged his love, so that he might obey the laws of convention, and did not see the Countess again. It was one of the great blows of his life. His mother feared that he might die, and watched over him night and day for a month, helping to bring him back to life by the magnetic influence of her maternal looks and caresses. He recovered, but she remained tired, weak and infirm.

Enrico, at twenty-eight years of age, had become one of the leading names in Italian poetry. He was the friend of writers, men of letters, politicians and journalists ; he was received at Court, and by the aristocracy. But for this kind of life money is needed. His brother, the captain of a liner, renounced his share of the property, gave it to the poet, and took an engagement for five years between America and England. The younger brother, also, gave him all he possessed, and went as a mechanical engineer to direct a factory at Lyons. Enrico wept, and threw his arms round the necks of his brothers, who were voluntarily exiling themselves ; he would not let them go away, and finally fell down in a swoon. His mother was

lost in admiration of Enrico's tender feelings. He now had an adequate income, which could maintain him well in his elegant, but not very lucrative, calling of poet. But, for the reception of his visitors, who were always celebrated people, his father's middle-class house was scarcely suitable ; it was not Enrico who thought such a thing, but his mother, who perceived it intuitively, and almost forced her son to choose some small bachelor quarters in a large and important street. Enrico did not wish to do so, but in spite of him his mother furnished the new quarters, which were perfumed and luxurious, and he went there unwillingly. Her poor son was nervous and disheartened at the idea of leaving the paternal roof : or so his mother said.

Now that his position was established, Enrico wrote beautiful lyrics, humanitarian and socialistic in tone, describing the hunger and the poverty of the proletariat, and taking up the cause of the workers. In his poems there were such hot gusts of wrath, such a continual flow of love and goodwill, such a deep sense of humanity, that in truth it was said of him that he was the greatest-hearted poet in Italy. His family were proud of him. One of his sisters, ashamed of making a humble match, renounced a love affair of many years' standing for the sake of her brother's name. Enrico understood it all, kissed his sister on the forehead, and dedicated to her a stupendous ode, one of the best that he had ever written.

Honours were showered on his head. He was sent to represent Italy at a festival of poetry : he went : and was welcomed, acclaimed and applauded. In the meanwhile, at home, his mother was dying. The news of her grave danger arrived during the assembly, while he was reading a poem which he had composed for the occasion ; it was not given to him till afterwards. He telegraphed : "Am dying of despair, returning." He did not arrive in time ; but his telegram did so, and his mother died blessing the noble heart of her son. When he reached home, he tore his hair, and threw himself upon her dead body. He followed it to the cemetery. For a year his lyrics mourned the loss of his mother. The other sister, giving

up all thought of marriage, went to live in his home, so that she might keep house for him.

When he was thirty-five an attractive young girl, who was rich, but *bourgeoise*, fell in love with him. Enrico paid no attention ; he did not love her. She moped, and became ill ; and her father begged and implored Enrico to marry the girl, who had a dowry of three hundred thousand *lire*. Again he said no. He did not allow himself to be persuaded until he was told that she might die. He married her, telling everyone that he was sacrificing his happiness, his independence, everything. The ladies commiserated him. Of course, the poet's wife did not understand him, and the poet, to console himself, sought the company of ideal women elsewhere. He suffered, lamented bitterly in his lyrics, and told the world, and the women he loved, of the sorrows which his great tortured poet's heart had to bear. His poor wife died in child-birth : the baby survived but a few days : and Enrico, the poet, inherited from his wife and daughter three hundred thousand *lire*.

(From "La Vita è così lunga." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

ROBERTO BRACCO

(1862-)



(I)

IGNAZIO FUORIBONA

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

IN the rustic dining-room of the only inn to be found in Aricella, the supper had been served by the landlord himself, who was nicknamed Noè ; and had now reached the stage when the sparkling yellow wine—the juice of his famous vine, which he had offered as his own contribution to the entertainment, was enlivening the final festivities of the board. The guests consisted of several engineers, who had come to spend some weeks in the place while they made plans for the construction of a tunnel, and of a queer specimen who had arrived that same day about sunset, all by himself, and quite unperturbed by the blinding rain, like a German tourist. He was a stout man, who was always laughing uproariously, and in spite of his fat he seemed extraordinarily elastic ; he looked like an enormous toy, a hippopotamus of thin rubber, inflated with air. And it was due solely to him that the gravity of the engineers, who were always having technical discussions, had given way to boisterous good humour.

The new arrival had filled the inn with his exuberant laughter, and had proclaimed his urgent appetite with facetious frenzy. Then he had ventured to break into the kitchen, and to implore the compassion of the cook, who was the inn-keeper's wife. He had recognised her at once, with a wealth of noisy banter, as a countrywoman who had suffered from

his pinching and teasing thirty-five years before, that is to say when, as a student at Naples, he was exploring in the mountains of the Sorrento peninsula and playing the buffoon everywhere. Having mollified the cook, and persuaded her to depart for once from the usual time-table of meals, and to prepare the supper immediately, he had seized the bell-rope to assemble the occupants of the inn. When they all came running up, he had asked them to excuse the furious ringing of the bell and the alteration in the sacred dinner-hour. Having said all this, he had introduced himself :

"Ignazio Fuoribona, the bore."

And at supper, as he ate and drank with the enjoyment of a knowing gourmet, he held forth on cooking, told anecdotes of all sorts, declaimed humorous verses, puzzled those good engineers, who were none of them Neapolitans, with his jokes, and poured out an excited torrent of Neapolitan wit. He laughed and laughed, infecting his audience with his hearty mirth.

"Hurrah for Naples !" exclaimed one of the engineers, who was a Piedmontese. "You Neapolitans are all merry, here below."

"No, no, my dear sir," returned Ignazio Fuoribona, still laughing ; "you are mistaken, indeed you are mistaken. It has been discovered that that choice funereal blockhead called Hamlet was born at Naples."

"You do not resemble Hamlet in the least."

"He was a little thinner than I am."

"And you are extremely cheerful."

"The more so that I have not lived at Naples for a quarter of a century."

Another member of the company broke in :

"It is true that not all Neapolitans are cheerful. Our colleague Verrusi, for instance, is a melancholy Neapolitan."

Ignazio Fuoribona questioned him with an earnest, almost anxious, curiosity :

"Verrusi ? Achille Verrusi ? The engineer Achille Verrusi?"

"Exactly, the engineer Achille Verrusi. It is he who has

brought us here, and who will be our manager when we begin work on the tunnel. Do you know him ?”

“By Jove ? Do I know him ? But where is he ? where is he ? Is he hiding himself ?”

“He had an appointment with the mayor of Aricella, and besides, he did not know that we should dine more than half-an-hour earlier than usual.”

“Heavens above us !” cried the indiarubber hippopotamus, lifting his huge arms (which were indeed just like the legs of a hippopotamus), and clapping his fleshy hands in the air. “He will be angry with me ! He will curse me !”

“But why should he ? Noè has kept his supper for him.”

“I swear by my bald head that he will curse me. That man has always cursed me !”

“Cursed you ? Why ?”

Just then the voice of Achille Verrusi, harsh and almost angry, reached them from the steps outside.

“May misfortune overtake all the saints in Heaven ! It has been raining since nine o’clock. . . . In July too. It’s enough to drive one mad. And, in addition, the crumbling remains of these old steps are uncovered, so that one may easily break one’s leg on them, when it is raining like this.”

“‘Wolf ! Wolf !’ as the old fable says,” someone remarked.

“Poor me !” Ignazio Fuoribona sighed, with a ludicrous expression.

The little party, which by now had become quite reckless, was much amused by the comical grimaces of alarm, which made that bald perspiring head and great, square-set, puffy face still more grotesque. It seemed as if Nature had intended to play a practical joke when she put together a mouth almost as large as the jaw, thin moustaches like those of a youth of twenty, a great massive hooked nose, a pair of small round eyes like those of a little owl, and very thick eyebrows, which might more worthily have taken the place of the moustaches.

The entry of Achille Verrusi was hailed with delight by the company, who, knowing that at the end of the day his humour was usually very sour, were anticipating with amuse-

ment his meeting with the energetic hippopotamus, who now seemed to be assailed by panic. And, as it happened, the meeting did not go off smoothly. That persecuted clown, Ignazio Fuoribona, with the impetuosity of one who wishes to overcome and conceal his tremors, got up hastily, knocking his paunch against the table, on which the glasses and bottles reeled and quivered for very fear, and as though he were waiting to embrace and to be embraced by his friend, he clasped the air, extending his chest towards the newcomer.

"Achille ! Dear old Achille ! My good friend ! My very dear friend !"

"But who are you ?" objected the other, standing still and frowning.

"Don't you recognise me ? I am Ignazio. . . . Why, what the devil ! . . . I am Ignazio Fuoribona !"

The "very dear friend" grew pale and clutched his beard. Then he became flustered and confused and he stuttered :

"Excuse me. How could I ? . . . How could I guess ? . . . We have not met for such an age. . . . And there is five times as much of you as there used to be . . ."

"One does one's best," and that laughing mouth opened wide, but this time it emitted, instead of a laugh, a sound which was something between the cough of an asthmatic and the stifled gobble-gobble of a turkey-cock. "Sit down, sit beside me. Dear old Achille. I want you to have your supper here, beside me. I want to wait on you myself."

Achille Verrusi gave a start : "Oh, no, thank you !" escaped from his lips.

And as the audience, like that in the pit of a theatre, clamoured with one accord, urging him not to refuse to sit "beside him," so that they might prolong this entertaining little scene, he threw them a sour glance, and added :

"I must ask you to desist. I am not hungry just now, and am not going to dine. . . . I am drenched to the skin. . . . I am tired, and in a very bad humour. Leave me alone !"

At that moment Noè entered, carrying a steaming soup-tureen.

"Macaroni broth, Signor Engineer."

"Go to Blazes !—the bally lot of you !"

He rushed off storming, down the passage of the inn, and they heard the bang of a door. Noè remained rooted to the spot, with the soup-tureen in his hands. The company did not know whether they ought to go on making merry or not, and they looked doubtfully at Ignazio Fuoribona, who pushed up his lips until they almost reached the curve of his parrot-like nose, which had grown as red as a poppy. And they went on looking at him, until he began to play the buffoon once more :

"Did you see, my friends, how my fellow-citizen treated me ? He did not curse me openly, but he cursed me—between the lines. You are stupefied, and Noè is stupefied too, he is the very image of Don Bartolo in 'The Barber of Seville' : 'Behold Don Bartolo ! he looks like a statue,' and as for that wretched macaroni broth, what sin has it committed that it should be thus despised ? Well, I will eat it myself at midnight, before going to bed ! Do you understand, Noè ? Ask your wife whether she will kindly remember to keep it hot for me."

Cheerfulness was then restored by an outburst of general hilarity, and after a brief interval of vivacious, if incoherent, chatter, in which all took part, Ignazio Fuoribona refilled his glass, and, subsiding into his chair, once more asserted himself and became as voluble as ever.

"The beauty of it is that none of you have asked me what quarrel I have with our friend Achille. Why haven't you questioned me ? Is it out of delicacy ? It brings tears to my eyes, but I am pleased to satisfy your secret curiosity. If I do not satisfy it to-night our friend Achille will do so to-morrow. It would be simply another edition of the same story : a revised and enriched edition, too much enriched. . . . I prefer to give you mine."

"Yes, yes !"

"Tell it to us, Signor Fuoribona."

"You will be giving us a real treat."

"A great treat."

"Well, then, gentlemen," he began, "when I had the honour of presenting myself to you, and humbly assigned to myself the name of a bore, I was less than conscientious. A bore, yes, and of no common order, but that is a trifling attribute. I am, above all things, the possessor of the Evil Eye."

There was an "oooh" of protest. He continued, waxing enthusiastic, and speaking with his eyes, nose, hands, ears and belly, as well as with his mouth. His voice seemed to come from every pore in his body.

"The Evil Eye ! The Evil Eye ! Neither more nor less. I am a celebrated, an illustrious possessor of the Evil Eye ! I have never wished to do any harm. I wouldn't have hurt a fly, or even a flea, but I have evidently done harm to half the world. I have often been a witness to the harm that I have done. Believe me, my dear sirs. And that this evil was really my own work, and not that of the devil, nor of his tail, was corroborated by the convictions of others, of which I felt conscious wherever I went—until at length I came to cross the frontier, like an absconding cashier, hoping that in a foreign country, and in fresh surroundings, I might lose my involuntary powers. Now, one of the first people to become aware of my baleful faculties was our friend Achille ! We were near neighbours at home ; he lived with his family, and I, an orphan, alone with an old serving-woman. Achille was starting his career as an engineer, I was starting mine as a doctor. Yes, O Signori ! as a doctor, and to my new profession I consecrated an enthusiasm worthy of an Apostle. Enthusiasm was my characteristic ; I took everything to heart. I offered my time, my energy and my devotion, careless of the ingratitude that I often reaped. In particular I offered all this to our friend Achille, whom I loved from my heart. I put myself at his disposal, and would knock at his door to tender my services. 'Can I be of any use to you ? Is there anything that you want ?' I would wait to greet him at the porter's lodge, and would call to him from the window. I sent him little presents, I invited him to dinner and to the theatre. I proclaimed him the best engineer in Naples. And when there

fell on him, like a series of thunderbolts, four or five disasters one after the other, among which were the disappearance of a pocket-book containing five thousand *lire*, the death of a dog that he loved like a son, and the collapse of a mansion that he had built, I was in even greater despair than he. In spite of this, however, when, one day, he happened to slip on a fig-skin, while walking in the street with me, I saw him transformed before my face into a demoniac. With bloodshot eyes he announced to me that I had the Evil Eye. And although he apologised at once, from that day forward he sought, as politely as possible, to avoid me. Was I really possessed of the Evil Eye? I marvelled, I grieved. But then I said to myself: 'Rubbish! It is all nonsense. It is a fantasy of his! He will change his mind.' He did not change his mind. And to make matters still more serious, several other people shunned me, and fled away from me. It was in vain that I strove to be zealous, courteous, humble and obliging. Things went from bad to worse. I sowed grain, and in its stead I saw weeds springing up. Sometimes when I appeared I would surprise my acquaintances in the act of making little gestures, little precautionary signs against the Evil Eye. They are signs and gestures of every kind, and some of them are—well, most elegant. I pretended to be at my ease, whereas inwardly I was really suffering a great deal, for I felt degraded . . ."

A pitying murmur surged round him. "No, no! Don't," he said reprovingly. "What is the matter?" And once more raising his voice, which had fallen rather low, and waving his napkin in the air, he said: "Come! cheer up! Don't vex yourselves on my account! All this happened long ago. A great deal of water has passed under the bridge since then. You may listen to me without spoiling your digestions."

He took the glass of wine, which was sparkling on the table beside him, and emptied it at a draught; then he went on with his story:

"As matters stood thus, the new doctor was a cheat. You can well understand it, eh? A doctor with the Evil Eye is no longer a doctor, but a grave-digger. It was right that the

sick should avoid seeing me, even more than the sound. And besides, it cannot be denied that those few sick people that I still had the chance of attending at this period all died, without exception ! The plague itself could not have done more. Driven out, isolated, reduced to treating myself that I might have the pleasure of treating someone, I decided that the time had come to leave Naples. I went to Milan, with some recommendations from my former professor, Doctor Fanzi, and there I received the patronage of a famous clinic doctor, from whom I asked for a small number of patients among the chronic invalids. They are the most remunerative and the least compromising, as you can understand. In this way I started my career afresh. I took courage once more. I made a few more acquaintances, and, as is usual with me, I was zealous, courteous, humble and obliging with them—even more zealous, more courteous, more humble and more obliging with them than I had been in Naples, because it seemed to me that I owed to my new friends a kind of regeneration. If I were to tell you that I was always welcomed with real cordiality, I should lie. I was respected, however, and that was enough for me. And it was not long before I found something which was more worth having than mere respect. If you had been Neapolitans, I should have let you accompany my words with a crescendo of those classical mocking sounds of which the Neapolitan mouth is master. I fell in love ! A sweet young girl, the daughter of one of the chronic invalids, accepted me. We adored each other. At that time, it should be explained, I was not the rococo monster that I am now. I had neither double-chin nor paunch, and I was so supple that I could twirl like a ballet-dancer. My cranium had up till then been spared that hairless state which is prepared by destiny for one portion of humanity. So there was nothing absolutely absurd in what happened. I put forward my petition for a marriage. The father and mother consented. I saw happiness coming towards me ! . . . But while the sweet girl was preparing her trousseau, and I was gradually building the conjugal nest, the illness of my father-

in-law-to-be took an alarming turn, and at the same time it seemed to me that my reputation for the Evil Eye overtook me at Milan. Heavens ! What fear ! what anxiety and distress ! What palpitations ! I kept watch over myself, and over all the people who knew me. I distrusted myself, and distrusted them too. One day I noticed that seven of these people had sought to observe me from a distance by different methods. The evening of the same day, a gentleman, to whom I had been introduced but a short time before, had just greeted me outside the Scala Theatre, when he was knocked down by a motor-cycle, and received a number of injuries. The events of Naples were beginning all over again. The landlord of my lodgings found his safe broken open and empty. The chemist that I frequented was abandoned by his wife, and went mad with grief. All my chronic invalids grew worse. The father of my fiancée died. The mother dismissed me—I begged and prayed her to hear me, and asked for explanations. It was no use. I received a command never to let myself be seen there again, and I obeyed. Moreover, the reasons for my dismissal were repeated to me, clearly and roundly, in an anonymous letter, which ended thus : ‘A disastrous man, such as you are, has no right to marry.’ And at the bottom of the letter, right in the place usually occupied by the signature, intended as a safeguard to the writer against the Evil Eye, there was . . . a horn !”

Some of his hearers laughed below their breath.

“Yes, that horn was amusing, but I must confess that it—it made me weep.”

And saying this he half-closed his little owl-like eyes, which blinked in that great face, now inflamed with wine, and he tried to restrain a tear.

They all roused themselves in an effort to cheer him, trying at the same time to conceal the fact that they had seen his emotion. They disputed the truth of the story, crying : “Down with superstition !” They vied with one another in making comforting remarks ; one ascribed to him a pessimistic imagination, another a persecution-mania, another a

vein for tragi-comic romance, while yet another actually suggested a drunken fit of depression, caused by Noè's untrustworthy wine.

"Thank you ! Thank you, my dear sirs," interrupted Ignazio Fuoribona in an unexpectedly humorous falsetto. "I appreciate the condenscending kindness of your intentions, but I forbid you to slander Noè and his wine, every drop of which fills the veins with a smile of Bacchus. And so that you may not make yourselves miserable any longer in consoling me, I will skip the description of my flight from Milan, I will skip the particulars of my disastrous sojourns in Genoa, Turin, Venice and Brescia, which added considerably to my toll of dead and wounded, and which were succeeded by so many more precipitate flights, and I will solemnly assure you that for years and years I have been one of the most enviable creatures in this world ! My degree of doctor of medicine lies in the St. Gothard tunnel, where I threw it, from the window of my carriage, the day on which I escaped into Switzerland ; and now I live at Zurich, selling coral and tortoiseshell, eating, drinking, laughing, growing fatter and older, a bachelor, disregarded and alone. Whether I have continued to do harm I do not know. There, certainly, no one has ever told me so, no one has ever thought such a thing. I have even been able to live in the complete illusion that my malefic powers have been dispersed. And, you see, it is for this reason that I have allowed myself, without scruples of conscience, to yield to the longing to breathe once more, for a short time, the air of my own beautiful country. All the same, my dear sirs, beware ! beware ! for I cannot give you any guarantee—I advise you to take precautions !"

At this point he was overcome by his characteristic hearty laughter, which resounded through the inn. One of the engineers, taking up the joke, cried out :

"We defy danger, and ask you to drink our healths !"

And the others shouted :

"Wine ! Wine !"

"Another bottle of the 'Smile of Bacchus !' "

"Two bottles !"

"Noè is treating us."

"No, no, it is we who must treat Signor Fuoribona !"

The latter, standing up and puffing out his paunch, shone with jubilation, and laughed heartily. Just as Noè was preparing to fetch the two bottles from the buttery, and the uproar was at its height, Achille Verrusi crossed the room in haste.

They plucked up the courage to ask him :

"But where are you going at this hour ? Where on earth are you going ?"

"You are all mad this evening ! I am going to dine at the tavern. Good-night."

He rushed out. As he crossed the room the tumult ceased. And after a moment of strange silence they heard something heavy rolling down the steps. Then a moan ! The engineers and Noè stared, white with terror, at Ignazio Fuoribona, and then they ran out of the door, through which Achille Verrusi had just passed. Immediately their voices resounded in a chorus of confusion, horror and consternation. From the dining-room only a few words could be distinguished—a few broken sentences :

"He slipped on the wet step."—"His spine . . ."—"His head . . ."—"He is unconscious . . ."—"Damn ! . . ."

"Quick ! a handkerchief—the back of his head is broken."

Ignazio Fuoribona, with a rattle in his throat as though he were suffocating, staggered across the room ; and like one who had suddenly found himself in the dark, he groped for the entrance to the passage. He ran down it, trailing his hands along the walls. He made an effort to recognise his room. In a brief lucid interval he found the room and entered it. He felt for his bed like a blind man. With difficulty he stretched himself on it, with his great paunch uppermost, and burst into a storm of sobs.

(From "La Vita e la Favola." Palermo, Sandron, Publishers.)

(II)

A WALL

(Translated by E. D'ESTERRE-STAHN)

UP there, on the fifth floor, that massive wall of Old Naples, common to two adjoining palaces—in the sad decrepitude of which human beings multiplied like mice—separated two small chambers ; so near and yet so far.

No communication, ever, had taken place between these two chambers. Diverse were even the night-beetles, creeping through the cracks that looked like deep wrinkles—diverse the spiders that—on one side as on the other—draped the dusty walls. But in the grave silence of that winter night, the perpetual murmur of a sewing machine—monotonous, insistent, hurried—pierced the wall, making for itself an invisible passage while the ancient stones—passive spectators between the two chambers—revealed themselves a little to one another.

He, after long debate with a weary brain, now knocked resolutely on the wall with his knuckles. He knocked several times. The noise of the machine stopped, and he—breathing as if he had suddenly been relieved of an incubus—an obsession—placed his ear against the wall to listen whether anyone would speak to him. And actually he became conscious of a weak female voice.

“Who is knocking on the wall ?”

“Good woman, do you hear me ?”

“Who are you ?”

“Don’t be afraid. I am your neighbour.”

“And what do you want ?”

“Good woman, I pray of you to wait till morning to work your machine.”

“I cannot.”

"You cannot ! What is that to me ? At this hour I have the right to sleep."

"It is true, but I beg of you, in pity let me work."

"Have you not another room, good woman ?"

"No."

"You might go out on the landing—you might go, how should I know ?—on the stairs."

"It is cold, to-night. And also the door is closed and I have no key."

"You are in your own house, and you have no key to the door !"

"No."

"Why ?"

"I haven't got it."

"And then ?"

"A little patience, and you will soon go to sleep."

Both of them, alternately speaking and listening, put first the mouth and then the ear, to the wall ; and both gesticulated as if they imagined they could see each other by turns. They continued the conversation.

"It's no use for me, good woman, to have patience. Since you wish to know, I will tell you. I don't want to sleep, but to work. I also have to work."

"And what prevents you ?"

"The noise of your machine. My thoughts wander, my brain reels. I cannot even see the paper in front of me. I am accustomed to work, to drudge, to write with hell all round ; but on this cursed night the noise of your machine exasperates me, maddens me."

"Wait till the morning, sir. In the morning I shall have done."

"Wait yourself."

"I have already told you that I cannot."

"And I also cannot wait."

"Then, sir, try to work in another room."

"I only have one. Like you. I enter it from the balcony. But if I work there, in the open air, I shall die. I have a bad illness."

"Poor thing, I am sorry !"

"Oh, you are sorry, but you won't do anything to help me."

"Forgive me, sir. If you only knew . . ."

"What ?"

"In one hour, the stuff that I have to sew must be finished—otherwise . . ."

"Otherwise ?"

"Don't ask me anything. But have pity on me !"

"Are you going back to the sewing machine ?"

"Yes, I am going back. Forgive me ! Forgive me !"

"No ! No ! No ! If the noise begins again it will be impossible for me to get done. And in an hour—like you—just like you . . . Will you explain ?"

"Have pity. Have pity on me !"

"And why shouldn't you have pity on me ?"

"I am a woman."

"I am ill."

"Poor thing. Poor thing. If you insist, I will agree—but take care, sir, take care, or you will suffer remorse !"

"Remorse ?"

"Yes, remorse."

"Have you, perhaps, to sell your work quickly in order to buy medicine ?"

"Don't ask me !"

"Is your invalid an old man or a child ?"

"Don't ask me !"

"Is it your son, your father, your mother ?"

"I beseech of you, do not ask me !"

He was silent. He waited—his heart heavy with anxiety and anguish. After a few moments he again heard the noise of the machine. He heard it beating on his brain, he heard it—continuous, monotonous, hurried, insistent, relentless.

"My God !" My God !" he murmured, and almost staggering, he seated himself again in front of the writing table, buried under journals and papers, in the midst of which flickered the flame of an invalid lamp.

Before him lay some sheets of paper, already written on, and

others that were blank. He looked at them, and with a strong effort of will, he took up his pen. But he saw it tremble at the point, and this trembling seemed to him to be produced by the repercussion of the sewing machine. The words that he read on the written pages danced in time with the sewing machine, and his eyes followed their giddy movement. The trembling at the pen's point ascended to his hand, from his hand to his arm, from arm to head. The tic-tac was in the air, in the dancing words, in his nerves, in his body, in his brain. What had he to write? He did not know—he could not remember. Everywhere—inside him, around him, was noise, noise, noise, and nothing else. God! God! On the spotless paper, the paralysed pen—every now and then dipped in ink—made mysterious scrawls—or let fall black tears. And the hours passed . . .

When a loud ringing at the door-bell shook him violently from head to foot, he became conscious that a first ray of sunlight had penetrated through the window, dimming the flame in the lamp.

"It is he!" he thought, and opened the door in anxious expectation.

A man entered, bringing with him some of the cold outside air; his nose was scarcely visible between the brim of a tattered and dirty top hat pushed down over his ears, and the big cape of a loose cloak which almost hid his meagre person.

"Is it done?" asked the man in a cracked voice.

"No, it is not done," answered the youth, spreading out his arms despairingly.

"You are joking!"

"It is not done, I say. That is the truth."

"What? It's not possible! It's not possible!" The man let himself fall into a chair, extending from under his cloak his dirty hands with their claw-like fingers, while the pupils of his greenish eyes grew large beneath his red and shaggy brows.

"It isn't possible!" he continued. "By this time the paper ought already to be out. And if it comes out without the article against Raffaele Pagani I am ruined. Oh, why don't

I know how to write myself? Poor me! I have compromised myself! To-day is the decisive moment in this electoral struggle. I ought to have secured the money. And instead? . . . Instead they will beat me, they will say that I am an impostor—a traitor. But you are the traitor—yes—you—you—”

“No, Don Gennarino, calm yourself! . . . I am not a traitor. I did not know how to write the promised article. I have always thought well of Raffaele Pagani. I believe him to be a good man. But all the same I had the will to accomplish my task and to vilify him, ruin him, break him. But in the very moment of formulating a whole fabric of fantastic and fabulous accusations, I was not able to find one idea. I could not even spell—could not form the letters that make the words.”

“Go and retail your scruples to others—not to me! You are a born libeller, and we know you!”

“Am I a born libeller? You are right. I can only answer—you are right.”

And while saying this, in a tone of melancholy resignation, the young man coughed, while the other began his lamentations again:

“Oh, the paper—the paper! What shall I do? Poor me! Poor me! What a disgrace! What dishonour! And this is how you reward the man who gives you work, who gives you the means to live. This is your gratitude. Traitor! Assassin! But by St. Gennaro, you may spit in my face if I give you a chance to earn another ha’penny. You may begin to-day to feel the pangs of hunger, and if you look for charity, much good may it do you! Oh, poor me! They will beat me! They will say that I am an impostor and worse. I had given my word. What humiliation! What disaster! Charity, yes—yes—look for charity now! Hope you may get it!”

He went away on his infirm legs, wrapped in his big cloak, and still convulsively breathing curses. “Go, look for charity. Go, look for charity!”

On his feet before the writing table, motionless, but com-

posed, the young man repeated softly : "Begin to-day to suffer the pangs of hunger !"

But the defamatory article had not been written. Why had he not written it ? For what reason ? He could not account for it. He looked around him. The shutters were still closed. In his room it was still night, and from the street, from the neighbouring houses, there rose softly, softly, amid the confused voices of awakening—the life of the new day. The noise of the machine had stopped. The massive old wall was again impenetrable. Through it had not filtered the few unsteady words addressed to the watching woman by the drunken sot who, at dawn, had opened the door with his jailer's key, and thrown himself, face downwards on the bed, filling the air with his noisome breath. On entering, he had said to her :

"If you don't give me food by mid-day, I'll wring your neck like a chicken !"

Now, the wine-sodden wretch was sunk in a profound, unhealthy sleep. The woman, with her bundle of sewn linen under her arm, prepared to go out, happy in having the means of gratifying his wish. Before leaving the room, she thought of her neighbour to whose pitiful indulgence she owed this miserable happiness—perhaps her life.

She knocked lightly on the wall. The youth trembled while—like an idiot—he sat almost talking to the spotless sheets of paper. "Charity ? But the sewing machine prevented me from discrediting—from calumniating—a good man—and you smile on me—you smile . . ."

He recognised that the woman was calling him, and he replied—knocking softly also. Then both of them, simultaneously put their lips to the wall. Simultaneously they said : "Thank you !"

The pleasant words were heard by neither, for their two mouths touched the wall of separation at the same moment. And each one left the wall, murmuring

"No, it was not she !"

"It was not he !"

(From "Smorfie Tristi." Palermo, Sandron, Publishers.)



ALFREDO PANZINI

(1863-)



(I)

THE SPARROW'S HEART

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

I H A V E no intention of denying it.

Every time I used to go back to my old house, I felt the sparrow in his little cage, hanging on the broad wall of the staircase, was something peculiar and sacred to the house, rather in the same category as the sad picture of Christ there was below the cage.

The sparrow was a kind of living *deus indiges*, a little domestic deity however unmelodious. Now and then he would twitter—*chee chee*!—when the sun darted its golden beams on his cage.

Spring sun followed the snows of winter, and sad autumn with all its dead things died with the fleeting year.

June was filled with the perfume of honeysuckle, but the scented flowers fell as all things fall in the end. These things happened nine times : nine years had elapsed since the sparrow first hung by the wall.

Now and then a twittering noise broke the silence ; it was the sparrow with his millet or his dry melon seeds.

Whenever I came home again from a far away city (my life has grown hard and sad these days) I felt I had to ask after the old sparrow in his cage.

"Is he still alive?" I asked.

"Yes, my son : he's still alive," my mother answered.

* * *

The little creature reminded me of all sorts of sweet bygone things, years and years ago. I had first got the sparrow nine years ago, in a town a long way away from home. This was how it happened. One April evening as I was walking along a street, I heard something drop in front of me. It was a little sparrow, still unfledged, that had fallen from a nest up in the roof.

I picked him up, fed him and cared for him.

And he lived.

And in that far city where I was living all alone, the sparrow kept me company. I remember there was a corridor with big sunny windows, and there the sparrow lived and went the whole length of the passage in four or five hops. And I remember he had broken one of his legs falling from his nest. I had set it but it was always rather crooked ever after.

One day I went home again and took the little sparrow to my mother ; she looked after him and I forgot all about it. What a lot of things one does forget ! However, every time I went home again after my wanderings, I asked whether he was alive.

"Yes, the little rascal," my mother would answer. And when I woke up in the morning and lay drowsing in bed, happy to be back again in my own bed and my own home after being away so long, I heard a little flutter of wings and a short "chee chee !" It must be that the sun was visiting its little prisoner friend, or that the bird guessed its golden rays were close, by some loving intuition it possessed.

* * *

What happened then ? What did yesterday bring ?

It grieves me deeply ; but I will tell you exactly how it happened.

* * *

Now you must realise that I was just back from a long journey. My mother knew I was coming and had prepared one of those lovely little meals that only mothers can arrange, where all the food is flavoured with love !

How lovely to be home again after spending so many nights

in an hotel ! How glorious to be able to stretch one's legs under one's own table, with the same old lamp hanging over it, and all the things on the table seem to welcome one !

The kitchen was all upside down with excitement and the fire was blazing in the hearth. When I am not at home, just one saucepan does for mother and the maid. The cat watches the food cook while the maid says her prayers.

But that day I came there were great goings-on in the kitchen. The joint was turning on the spit ; a great cauldron was boiling and bubbling away, the dry sticks were crackling and even the sun seemed to know all about it and came out again after days and days of rain.

There was a lovely tablecloth on the table, and the cruets ; they had brought out the dish of artichokes in oil you ate with boiled meat, and that was generally reserved for very special occasions. There was a great show of food and drink—a marzipan cake on a beautiful dish, two bottles of wine, the sort you don't touch for months and months so that they can tell you exactly how spiders spin their webs in charming arabesques, and how mice attack them in vain down in the cellar.

There were apples in wine syrup, grapes from the last vintage, and the dry olive branch on the wall, a souvenir of last Easter Day.

I thought of restaurants where the last flies come to die on the grubby tablecloth, and in the heavy smell of cooking, the waiter goes to sleep with his bristly chin on his dirty shirt front ; I thought of all the horrid meals I had had in the course of my wanderings. How shining and peaceful and welcoming the old table seemed at home !

"And how's the old sparrow ?" I asked, putting my hand on my mother's shoulder. She was just having a last look at the joint that the fire had marked with big brownish patches.

"As pleased as Punch !" she answered. And at that very moment the sparrow chirped "chee chee" as if in answer to my question : surely a ray of sunlight must have shone on his cage just then.

"Does the sun come just at noon, that he sings like that?" I asked.

"Yes ; at twelve the sun reaches his cage and then he gives a chirp or two ; but he doesn't make a sound all the rest of the day, the little rascal."

The meal started off merrily and then became rather sad, because wine does not always make one cheerful. There were just the two of us, as usual. We talked about old times, quite naturally, because I know just as well as Mother does that the future has no more in store for us, and we know quite well what to expect at last.

Perhaps this makes us less cheerful ; but it does not fill us with fear. At least we know how the road lies. May our lives end with the blessing of God and the knowledge that we have done no harm to our fellow-men !

So we talked about old times. The sad gentle outlines of departed friends rose up and crowded round us as if they too wanted to sit at the old table.

It is true that when one's conscience is at rest, speaking of the dead brings neither sorrow nor pain.

* * *

The two bottles were empty ; I had done them full justice. A low whining whisper could be heard from the kitchen, where the old servant had finished her chares and had started murmuring her interminable evening prayers.

The sparrow chirped "Chee chee !"

"Oh, he's awake !" said my Mother.

Then the beam of light that crossed the room faded softly and died like a dying flame.

On the wall there was a picture of me when I was at school in Venice, in a group of all the masters and pupils together. It had been taken (I remember it all so well) the day before we took School Certificate (*licenza Liceale*). It was a lovely July day. How much grief and hope, how many tears and unknown sorrows had been crowded into those eight years at school, far away from my parents' tender care ! I had hated school ; through the iron bars of my cubicle I could see the

brilliant blue of the lagoon that seemed infinitely sad, as if bowed down under the weight of memory and adventures ; and over in the distance near the grave yard, was the little island with its dark cypresses waving over the red encircling walls. The little island had a name but I have forgotten what it was called. I remember what heart-rending homesickness, what a wild desire for liberty I used to feel, and how I longed to see you again, Mother darling, and to see him who is now no more. . . I used to tell him and write to him passionately : "Take me away from school !" and he used to answer very soberly in beautiful clear Italian ; his letters were so kind—he told me to be patient, that it was all for my own good, that I should be grateful for it later on ; he spoke of our honour and looked forward to a glorious future together.

Poor Father ! We lived together for so little ; we had no time to attain all our wonderful ambitions that you worked yourself to death for and that I slaved for, for so many years—the best years of my life !

What a thrill of liberty I felt that day ! How impatient I was to get out of my prison and seize life like a lovely woman, to absorb it and enjoy it after eighteen years at last !

* * *

And other people feel just like me. O clear young foreheads, O bright young eyes ! Now many are dead and buried under the earth ; and many are bent by evil toil and trouble.

You dear old wise philosophy master, you were there too, you old wise man ; on that day when we went to be photographed and we rushed over stones and bridges like a horde of warlike savages ; you followed us then, and your eyes were full of tears, but you said nothing about that, and your words pleased us and filled us with hope and joy. Your tears meant : "Your shoulders too shall bear the burden ; and if the burden is not heavy on your shoulders, it will be heavy on your conscience, and that is far, far worse"—but you said nothing. You looked sadly upon our youth that took no thought for the morrow ; it was like when I saw a little foal skipping and gambolling round its poor old galled mother

who looked at her son with anxious eyes. He would have to carry loads too when he was older.

The sparrow chirped "Chee chee" again.

"The little wretch has woken up for good !" my mother said. "He knows you're back, that's why he's so lively."

"No, Mother ; you really oughtn't to have sent me away to school," I said, as if it were the end of a long speech. "You made a mistake there ; now I can never have those years of liberty back again !"

"My son," she said quietly, "all the world's a school, whether you're free or whether you're shut up. You at least earn enough to live on—and to keep your poor old mother out of poverty."

"Yes, yes," I said. "I suppose it's all right." I took her hand, and we left the room on the ground floor where it was getting dark, and went upstairs to the other rooms. But the landing where the sparrow was, was flooded with sunlight.

* * *

Every day after lunch my mother used to go up to the cage and give the old sparrow one or two seeds ; he used to take them prettily, and then she went off to her room again.

She did that yesterday ; but when the sparrow saw an unfamiliar face, he was shy about coming forward and turned his little head, darting his bright little boot-button eyes to see who was there besides Mother.

"It's your master, it's your master, you old sparrow—here, eat your seeds !"

So saying, she left him and moved off into her room. Her room was quiet and sunny, and looked out on to a little deserted garden. The sun came in through the big windows and shone on the images of saints and photographs of dear departed friends—friends departed so far away that you cannot reach them though you cross land and sea ; but we shall all reach them some day without any journey. And we may see them then, too.

My mother sits in a big armchair and reads her old-fashioned novels ; fantastic accounts of even more fantastic adventures.

I have never yet managed to get her to finish a good symbolic or psychological novel.

"Of course it may be well written and all that ; but it's too difficult—and too sad. . . . I'm sad enough without."

She reads the paper too, where she specially enjoys studying the adventures of kings and princes about which she is extremely well-informed. She knows all their family histories and relationships and marriages ; he married So-and-so, she did this or that . . .

When she is not quite sure, she turns to me and asks : "Now who is this Wilhelmina ? Is she So-and-so's daughter ? Well, how is it then she's not married ? She really ought to marry Prince What's-his-name. And King X——. What's the matter with him, I wonder ? He seems quite to have given up travelling."

I can never answer these questions properly, so I just say "Oh, they're all right " or something equally vague, to get out of having to answer.

As I was saying, she went back to her room again yesterday. I was left alone near the old sparrow's cage. It struck me I should like to renew my old friendship with him. Dash it all, we were old friends ! So I said to him : "Sir, do you know I picked you up in the street when you were still unfledged ? I rescued you from the little street boys who would have killed you ; I rescued you from hunger and cold, and looked after you and fed you and brought you up. You ought to give me something in return ; you ought to pay your debt to your master. Do you remember when you used to say *chee chee* in the sunny passage, nine years ago, and when you used to jump on to my shoulder ?"

I put my hand—my big hand that filled the whole cage—through the door, and with my five coarse fingers I seized the struggling little creature and brought it to my lips.

The sparrow's heart was beating.

It felt strange to hold such a tiny fragile creature.

If my fingers had tightened their hold just the slightest fraction of an inch, all those little bones would be broken and

that little heart would have stopped beating ; and no one would have said anything.

What a ridiculous temptation ! Something in the soft feathers made me long to squeeze them, just to see where the flesh was exactly, and how a heart would stop beating. Just now it was throbbing wildly, much more so than a man's heart because it was much lighter, like the beating of a rapid wing inside the bird.

"No," I thought, "I won't squeeze you, I will set you free again. You poor little animal, you've always lived on the stairs there without being able to do anything but say *chee chee* ! Now you're old, it's only right you should enjoy what all other birds enjoy until someone kills them—liberty !"

It was pitiful to feel that little heart throbbing so. How can such a tiny muscle beat so hard ?

When we men, great devouring creatures, eat a dish made of little birds, we do not even notice their little hearts ; we eat them along with everything else.

To think it's a little heart beating like that !

I thought of all kinds of machines that man has made ; uniform and multiform big machines and little machines . . .

But not a single one reminded me of this wonderful beating rhythm. This is a living sound, and the mechanic's name is God.

It beat with a panting motion that touched me deeply ; it beat so quickly that it must have done it ten times within a second, so noisily that I kept turning round anxiously, half afraid that Mother should hear and come out of her room to scold me. How does this little feathery creature manage not to burst ?

Its two little legs hung down helplessly from my fist. One was straight and the other crooked—the one I had mended nine years ago.

"Do you remember, you ungrateful little wretch, how I cared for you ?"

And with a finger of my other hand I stroked his little flat soft head. Now his little heart was beating frantically.

"Go !" I said. "Go—you at least can be free ! Go to your forest where there are all the wild beasts in the world that are born on the earth and walk on the earth—all except man ! Go and find a mate and build yourself a nest ! Fly over the forest, cleave the blue sky and learn to sing !"

Now the sun was sinking behind the grey roofs ; the motionless weariness of the sad old city was broken by the clanging of evening bells.

"Free !"

And I threw him up violently, opening my hand as I did so.

The sparrow described a short curve in the space, but it did not spread its wings to the blue distances, nor did it sing to greet its new-found liberty.

It fell heavily to the ground like a dead thing. Evidently I had squeezed him too eagerly without meaning to, and the little heart had stopped beating.

(From "*Piccole Storie del Mondo Grande.*" Milano,
Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

THE RIGHT OF THE OLD AND THE RIGHT OF THE YOUNG

(Translated by Miss GRACE GILL-MARK)

M o m o would often say, with a shake of the head that made his fat neck wobble :

"We can't go on like this. I mean, we shall get on much better when things have changed."

He is by no means a bad man, Momo, nor is he irritable ; it is simply that his spirit's ventilator is a small one.

When Momo was a boy, the smallness of this ventilator had suggested that he was not cut out for serious study. Now that he is grown up, it has turned him into a practical individual, of the kind that takes the world as it comes without asking the

why and the wherefore of things. He just gets along as comfortably as he can.

Momo does not want anyone to die. When he says that they will get on better at home if things change, he is not calling down death on anyone's head : oh, no ! He is merely voicing a fact as obvious to everyone as a rule of arithmetic.

"No, let them live if they want to," he says, "and welcome ! Only it does mean that what with all these expenses and four growing children it's stiff work to pull along, when your income's none too big."

The right to die.

The right to live.

Momo's wife is no more anxious than he is for the death of the two old women who welcome her into their home as a daughter.

To wish people dead, you have to hate them. But Martha, the daughter-in-law, is, like her husband, a placid soul in a laborious body. She goes to Mass on Sunday if she has time. But surely anyone, even the very saints in Heaven, can see that it would be better for their own sakes if the Lord would take them to Himself ? So says Martha to her friends, her husband, and whoever comes along ; and they all agree with her. She brings it into her prayers, too. "Dear Lord," she prays, "what is the good of those two poor old women lingering on ? They are only miserable and make others miserable."

Do not blame them too readily ; we are all like Momo and Martha ; it would be too mortifying for ourselves to sit in judgment on the soured spirit and bitter tongue that come of living at close quarters with two peevish, plaintive semi-invalids.

What are they doing in Life's railway station, these two phantoms ? They have missed the express and are waiting for the slow train of Death. A trying wait, both for the departing and for those who stay behind !

Well, let them wait. But meanwhile, all lamps must be kept alight for them alone, and all the guards stand ready, just for them ! What a saving of trouble, time, money and distress, if

the two phantoms had caught the fast train of Death. They grow weary themselves with waiting.

How long will it be now, the slow train of Death ? A flash of light, a rumble : is that it, drawing nearer through the night ? No, nothing yet.

§

Fortunately Mono's house is old, and in the past they had the sense to build big houses with spacious rooms and gardens.

We dislike each other less in big houses ; and those who conduct life's concert would be wise if they told the master builders to plan dwellings on an ample scale and make sure that they have a sunny aspect and some kind of garden. With all due respect to what we learn in school, we would recommend the teaching of horticulture as well. The experience of centuries has shown that the man who grows potatoes, celery, greens or flowers, is generally a kind and tender-hearted man. The modern tendency, on the other hand, to arrange families in layers of superposed rooms, the size of boxes, is utterly pernicious. This stratification of human beings is like conducting electricity through a number of wires that give off sparks of hatred, in poignant contrast with that universal brotherhood which some prophesy.

Therefore, big houses, with a sunny aspect and a garden.

§

Thanks to the size of Momo's house, the young couple, Momo and Martha, have been able to live apart from the old women : they form two separate families ; thus avoiding friction ; the old couple live on the ground floor, the husband and wife on the first.

But it was a cruel wrench for the two old women when they were separated from the grandchildren : never again will they stroke those soft, fair heads, at table ; never listen again to those sweet voices. The twittering of the swallows will be heard no more.

They say it was the doctor's orders. "It is unwise," he appears to have stated, "to let two old women who are so

unwell live at close quarters with the children, in dining-room and parlour." These considerations of health have given rise to the division of the household into two, the young—as we have said—occupying the first floor, the old on the ground floor. Each family does its own cooking. But sometimes the sound of the children crying upstairs brings the old women hurrying to the stairs ; then, halfway up, they remember they have been told not to go upstairs, so they turn back in silence, with drooping heads.

At other times—very often, in fact—one of the children, probably Mariuccia, will escape downstairs (she had grown so used to it !) and take refuge in granny's lap, blind granny.

Martha the laborious, Martha the sharp-eyed, knows what has happened. She goes after her child, catches her with her granny. "Come back at once !" says she peremptorily, beckoning hard. The little girl sees, obeys, runs back to her ; the grandmother, feeling her slip away, reaches out her trembling hands for the golden head, the dear little head with the baby smell ; but it has gone. She dares not call her ; her shaggy grey head sinks down on her knees. Motionless she stays for hours on end, brooding on the mysterious patterns woven by the darkness : such mysterious, such terrible pictures that the dead eyeballs will start out of their sockets at times, and the feeble mind reel. Then the nurses have to be sent for from the hospital, because one of her cruel attacks is coming on. Martha goes so far as to say that her mother-in-law is mad, and that it would be charitable to put her into an asylum for treatment. But she is not mad ; she has only lost the sight of those external eyes which see nothing but the things of this world ; and when infirmity closes these eyes to the light, others, mysterious ones, are opened within, that see things horrible and tragic, so that whoever looks on them becomes distraught.

Except when she is in the throes of an attack, the grandmother is quiet and contented. Steadily and slowly, her soft slippers go padding up and down the rooms ; one hand feels along the wall, the other is outstretched and moves from side

to side with a regular, unchanging motion, as if to clear away the darkness that has been closing in on her for years and years. She is trying to make a rift for the light to come through, for sometimes the blackness is not quite so dense. In brilliant sunshine, or when the oil lamp is high and bright, her eye can catch just a glimmer. Ah, the light ! "Merciful Lord," she prays, "grant me light once more. Even the ants can see,—let me see as much as they !"

Apart from this, Momo's mother has nothing the matter with her ; and except when she is attacked by her fits of melancholia she is mild and placid. She will ask about the hens in the chicken run : how many eggs they are laying, what price they are fetching. She wants to know if the washerwoman has brought back all the washing ; she dwells at length on the days when she did the laundry herself at home : the good old days ! She remembers the old zest for work, that she has no longer. Her lips tremble, as she mumbles to herself : oh, dear, the furniture has not been properly dusted ; and she flaps a duster about the room. She lingers lovingly over the food in her bowl, the good, nourishing food that puts new life in her veins.

"You have to keep her in hand worse than a child," says Martha, "she'd gobble up a bowlful twice over if you gave her the chance."

"An iron digestion," remarks the doctor.

"She'd digest nails !" exclaims Martha.

"She'll live to bury us all yet," says Momo.

"Yes, there's no telling how many more years she'll drag on," the doctor says. "Five, or maybe ten, there's no knowing."

"And the amount of things she uses up !" says Martha. "The lamp, for instance, half a litre of oil every evening. If she is supposed to be blind, why does she want a lamp at all ?"

"The sensation of warmth is converted, in her case, into one of light," explains the doctor.

Yes, when you come to think of it, this aged creature hovering about the place like a ghost, with that hand of hers trying to make a rift in the darkness, with those great blank eyeballs starting from their sockets, starved for light,—the sight of her,

day after day,—you can understand how sooner or later it gets on the nerves of those who have to live with her.

The other old woman is her sister-in-law, Momo's aunt. The doctor has been declaring for the past ten years that she will not get through another winter. Her ailment? Tabes, or consumption, something that has turned her yellow and transparent as alabaster.

"It's not that anyone has anything against her, of course," says Martha, "but there is something about her gives you the shivers. It is as if a corpse had risen from the coffin after three days. And that eternal whining noise,—and her nose always dribbling snuff—"

For though she is unconscious of it herself, an incessant, plaintive murmur comes from between her lips like the dribbling snuff. The voice is feeble but so fraught with anguish that its echoes carry all over the house. *Non sicut ego volo, Domine, Domine, sed sicut tu* : After saying it in Latin she repeats it in her own tongue : "Not my will, O Lord, but thine, be done !"

As a young girl she had been spiritually inclined and romantic. She had read the *Confession of St. Augustin*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, even Victor Hugo's *Esmeralda* ; but all she now remembers of them are certain forlorn appeals to Heaven thrilling with terror or despair.

As a young girl she had been rich, pretty and charming, according to a portrait of fifty years ago, which shows her in an attractive little round hat, a bodice and over-jacket, and a wide, full skirt, such as were worn at the time. Beside her is a flowering bush, and the young girl's hand is raised to pluck a spray of blossom.

Plenty of friends, plenty of money once, in the old home ! How was it she never married, never gathered any fruit from the flowering branch ? How did she lose friends, relations, fortune ? How did she lose her youth ? Youth, that deceives and is deceived, melted away in silence to be replaced by creeping malady. In silence too, her dowry melted away : silently her sacrifice was made complete.

She had a brother, who fell in love. The woman he wanted to marry was poor (the one who is blind now), so the sister provided her dowry. From this marriage one day Momo came into the world : the baby boy whom they all worked for, cried for ; on whom was lavished everything of the best, whose every whim was law and a sign of cleverness. In no time the babe grew into boyhood, youth, manhood. Whatever he wanted he had to have ; as a child it was toys in profusion, and sweets ; then a shot gun, then pocket money to treat his friends and pay for their junketings ; then he, in his turn, wanted a wife, a new toy in the form of plebeian Martha, who took up her position as mistress in his aunt's house. Then came the nephew's children, born in two succeeding years.

Like a shuttle running up and down the woof, so runs her mind, monotonously, through the years of her life. The darkness of the past lights up, as the night is lit by sudden flashes from the lighthouse at sea. "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. Only Thou, O Lord, art true. Pray God, wilt Thou not grant me eternal life ? Thy will be done. I will not come knocking at Thy gates like an importunate creditor. Thy will, not mine, be done !" And so saying she sinks voluptuously down into the divine abyss. Like suicide, she flings herself with a cry deep into the void that draws her. From St. Augustin and the *Imitation of Christ* she drinks in great draughts of the bitter waters of resignation.

But Momo is driven to exasperation by the plaintive sound of his aunt's voice.

"Why can't she take herself off ? She ought to have been dead long ago. She clings to life far more than I do myself !"

And his venomous tone really might make you think he is a bad man. But the fact is that not only Momo, but all of us, find it hard to know our own folk any longer when they have grown very old and decrepit. The funeral ceremony has already been performed and even our memories are underground. The actual moment of the change is not recorded, but it is a fact that Mother or Aunt are Mother and Aunt no

longer. Only the ghosts of what they were remain in the home, unwanted.

Momo is right : they are not willing to die. When the sun shines they have a feeling of security, as if death could not come that day. They both stand leaning on the wooden balustrade that looks over the orchard, and revel in the sunshine. From the orchard comes the clucking of hens.

The transparent one pushes an armchair with all her strength into a sunny spot and settles the stout one in it. She is easier to manage, the blind one, on a sunny day ! She meanders on with her puerile train of thought : hens, the washing, where all the noises are coming from, and why the bell is ringing.

Her sister-in-law follows her along the old, disused tracts, intent on keeping at bay the dreaded nightmares. Occasionally she breaks out : "I am the Mother ! Don't you know what it means, to be the Mother ? It means that everyone has to obey me. I am going to have my grandchildren with me, I am going to have Mariuccia ! That wicked Martha is teaching her to forget my very name."

"No, no . . ."

"Oh, yes she is ! I *will* have Mariuccia !"

She starts up to go, her sagging cheeks aflame, her hands feel the way before her as if the fingers had invisible eyes.

Her sister-in-law manages to calm her down, with an effort. "There, there," she keeps saying, and tries the force of suggestion by stroking back the grey hair from her forehead. She is gently persuasive : "To-morrow, my dear, to-morrow ! Mariuccia is still at school, and the soup is just ready." Then as soon as her mind is lulled her stomach begins to crave. She lingers a whole hour over her soup, eating with childish gusto, and when the bowl is empty she gets some bits of bread and wipes it out.

Night has fallen.

"It is time to say our prayers," whispers the diaphanous one. The blind one's face is set and flushed.

"Our prayers, Tuda . . ."

"No !"

"Why not, Tuda ?"

"Because there's no God to hear them ! Turn the lamp up."

Martha was going by just then, and the flame, unduly high, could be seen through the window ; so the transparent one turned down the lamp.

§

Yesterday, in the sunshine of a bright May day, there happened the queerest, the most unexpected thing.

Martha, the daughter-in-law, ran out into the street, screaming wildly, the children with her, till her shouts roused the whole neighbourhood.

This is just how it happened, so runs her tale. The carpenter and his boy had come to repair the balustrade because the woodwork was rotten and might give way under you. It had to be put right, because of the blind old woman who is always leaning on it.

But she had forgotten, she did not know—Martha didn't—that the men had not finished the work but had put the new part in loose instead of fixing it into the wall. The carpenter and his boy had gone off to lunch.

Oh, it had driven her crazy to see that old woman creeping up and down the corridor all day long, like a lost soul. Why couldn't she stay in the armchair and keep quiet ? Coming and going all the livelong day ! Well, so she had seen her go down the corridor as usual, waving her hand to and fro as she always did, to ward off the darkness.

When she saw her go into the farthest room she suddenly remembered about the loose woodwork. She shouted after her, but she couldn't hear. You knew she was deaf, among other things ?

Then Martha, the daughter-in-law, felt herself rooted to the spot with horror. She watched the blind woman make for the French windows. It was over in a second : down they went together, old blind woman, balustrade and all. In a moment, the window panes came back to view, blank, with sunlight

and green leaves showing peacefully through. But there was a dull thud down below ; and then it was that the daughter-in-law rushed into the street, rousing the neighbourhood with her cries.

They went down, all the neighbours, to the foot of the wall in the orchard. There they found the old blind woman, lying still. The doctor, hurriedly fetched from the village, said that a young person could have jumped from that height, a bare three yards, without much harm done, but for an old woman, heavy, stout, brittle-boned, a sudden fall like that . . . ! An accident was only to be expected. A double accident, to be exact ; for the other old woman, the spiritual one, followed her within the week.

One funeral did for both.

§

Martha the laborious spent two days clearing, ventilating and disinfecting the old women's rooms. After that, the fine flat on the ground-floor was ready for letting. Expenses fell, income rose. The right of the young had prevailed over the right of the old.

(From "Le Fiabe della Virtù." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(III)

THE LIBRARY MOUSE

(Translated by —)

IN late autumn of the year 19 , Professor Fulai, one of the Dictators of high culture, was somewhat pre-occupied.

Sigismondo Fulai was still an imposing figure. His health was good : his teeth were regular, and he smiled with charm and dignified patience. His head, although it contained a library (another library, equally well-ordered, existed in his house, on the first floor, overlooking the garden) was held erect with a slight swing. His voice was calm and soft, his face was shaven, his elegant shoes creaked, always bright with the polishing Battista gave them.

Battista was the name of his servant who dusted the papers—this was his contribution to science. He had come to know the books in the library by their bindings.

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Now, for some unknown reason, in the late autumn of the same year, the mice had invaded the library—the library on the first floor looking on the garden : and this was worrying.

Fierce, impossible to catch, these evil mice had done considerable harm. An incunabulum, for example, *Ars Moriendi*, with some extremely rare xylographs by Lorenzo Coster of Harlem, had been nibbled. Then there was a rascally mouse which had made its nest right inside the wardrobe in the Professor's bedroom, and from midnight until dawn there was a grinding so penetrating that, judging by the noise, it might have been a beast as big as the Devil. That piercing sound went on all night, and if by chance it stopped, this only happened as a finer touch in the torture, for, hardly was the Professor dropping off to sleep that it began again.

"Do you think I am correct, Battista, in thinking it is the same mouse which ruined Coster's xylograph?"

Much did he hate that mouse, almost as much as he hated those miserable persons who called him the Library Mouse ; for Professor Fulai was nice, but rather spiteful.

For, even if he did stay in libraries and among old records—as the chemist stays in the laboratory, and the astronomer in the observatory, after all—do not think that he was like one of those old untidy humanists of ours, who were said to restore the dead to life ! Fulai, on the contrary, was rather worldly, nor was he lacking in nice witticisms to please the ladies ; but he, at the most only succeeded in making the living sleep.

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"Battista," he said to his faithful servant, "this invasion of mice is troublesome. There must be an enormous *mus decumanus* in the wardrobe."

"Sir," replied Battista, "the porter's cat has had kittens, I have had two kept for me that are still taking their mother's

milk. Wait a few days and then you will see that the mere smell of cat will send the mice away."

"Do you think so?"

"Certainly, but in the meanwhile I will lay some traps."

"Excellently thought out!" said the Professor.

Battista put down several traps; two in the library, one in the wardrobe, and he baited them well.

Now, one night the Professor heard the horrid noise stop all of a sudden; then he heard a new but small, strange sound.

"You are caught," exclaimed the Professor in a Dantesque way, and he got out of bed, put on his slippers, switched on the light, and finally opened the wardrobe and saw a little something with a tail that was struggling violently in the trap.

It was the wicked mouse. Was it possible that it could be only this and so small as that? Yes, one single, tiny mouse, because when the light was out no more of the noise was to be heard.

"The Sminthean Apollo will not save you!" thought the Professor. Now he wanted some sleep: but it was already early morning, and the windows showed the pale light of the autumn day. Ah, to have an enemy in a cage, be it a man or a mouse, and to be able to torture him without prejudice, is enough to make one lose one's head. The Professor got out of bed, took the trap, and examined his enemy in the light of day.

The little mouse squirmed in supplication, as if it was saying, "Oh, Professor, in the name of your God, do not be cruel!"

But the Professor took a pointed paper knife and passed it two or three times through the bars of the trap, but he did not touch his enemy. He was disappointed.

"Wait, and thou shalt see a new game!" he said and he held the paper knife in the flame of a candle. But although he had all the duels of Ranaldo and Ferraguto at his finger tips, he could not bring himself to pierce the little mouse. The mouse, however, had to his misfortune, a tail, and this tail protruded from the trap. The Professor, who was now in the full heat of

the fight, understood at once the advantage he could take of that tail. With a certain repugnance he caught hold of it, pulled, and secured the little mouse—which, being intelligent, too, tossed itself furiously, trying to avoid the red-hot blade. It angrily showed its small but sharp teeth. Its eyes, those two little black points, shone with desperate rage. The Professor, unlike the old knights who hit their adversaries in front, wounded his enemy behind, because it was easier. The red-hot iron, whizzing, penetrated its body. The little mouse gave a shriek and fell, grinding its small teeth convulsively. It quivered now and again all over ; then it lay still.

And then the idea came to the Professor to kill the dead mouse. He took it out of the trap, and holding it by the tail, he let the little pointed head, with its long ears and bold whiskers, hang over the flame of the candle. It was then that the mouse showed the Professor that it is not all imagination what we read about the old knights, who, however knocked out they might seem, were never completely dead. At the heat of the flame the mouse twisted itself upwards. The Professor let the tail go at once, but the movement of the mouse was swifter ; so the Professor had for a second the horrible vision, and also the sensation, of the dreadful mouse suspended with its teeth in his thumb.

* * *

“Battista, have you some boracic acid ?” an unusual voice sounded in the silent passage.

Battista, when his master called him had orders to bring in the coffee—which the Professor took while still in bed—and not to speak, except when some extraordinary meteorological event had happened during the night.

Now that morning, Battista, rushing at his master’s call, saw him already up, in pink pyjamas, near the window, attentively looking at his own thumb.

No, he was sorry he had no boracic acid.

“Well, go to the nearest chemist’s and get some powerful disinfectant.”

Battista disappeared, and a short time afterwards he came back—but he looked dejected. The chemist could not give him powerful disinfectant without a medical prescription. He could only give lysoform. Battista carried, in fact, a tin of "*Lysoform, a powerful antiseptic, of pleasant smell, non-poisonous, destroys scab, scurf, black-beetles, snails*"—all this was written on the label. The Professor worked with a good deal of patience round his thumb, and with a good deal of that disinfectant, too, until Battista took the liberty of reminding his master that, if he intended to go to the inauguration of the Sanatorium, he must begin to dress.

On that day, in fact, the provincial Sanatorium for Consumptives was to be inaugurated, in the presence of an Under-Secretary of State and all the representative personalities of the town and province, in top hat and frock coat. Professor Fulai, a representative of high culture, had to be present at the ceremony.

A dozen motor cars carried all those top hats and frock coats through the eight miles of dreary, grey country, to where the Sanatorium stood, in a position considered "wonderful" by all. Then the top hats and frock coats walked in a long file along those white and shining passages, admiring the great lobby looking south, uttering many exclamations which meant: "How comfortable the Consumptives will be here!" Presently Senator X delivered a speech. Powerfully, he described tuberculosis or white-death. He gave impressive statistics, to which the statistics of battle casualties are mere trifles. Then he proceeded to the polemic part of his speech, about the curative methods of that illness. This second part roused the enthusiasm of all the doctors present.

But Professor Fulai felt a sense of strange uneasiness. All those statistics of death, all those heaps of dead men, that white building which would be the dwelling of doomed people, gave his imagination gloomy visions. That almost joyful polemic of the physicians seemed to him a monstrous thing, a shocking contradiction.

If he had been in a normal condition, Professor Fulai would

have taken no notice of all that ; he would not die, either in war, or of tuberculosis ; these things would have nothing to do with him. Death, in a distant future, would take him—a manuscript in his hands like Francesco Petrarca—gently, just as when we softly blow out a candle.

But on that day, being in an exceptional mood, he thought of things that normally are not thought of.

It seemed to him that his thumb was aching. What a strange and growing uneasiness ! At last the lugubrious lecture was finished, and he might move about. He saw every frock coat approaching the lecturer to congratulate him, but he, Fulai, looked at the sun which, from its low arch in the sky, was piercing through the haze, sending its rays over the black wood of the fir trees near by and the white building.

On his way back, in the motor car, he found himself just opposite Commendatore G., the Director of the pharmacological laboratory of the University. The Commendatore was having an animated discussion with a colleague about a lecture of Senator X.

"Extraordinary !" he said. "Was it not wonderful," he went on, addressing Fulai, "also from the literary point of view ?"

But the presence of that pharmacologist and bacteriologist had awakened a passionate desire in Professor Fulai to question him about the existence of germs, how they infect organisms, how the disinfection and cauterisation, in case of bites, works, on the efficacy of *lysoform*.

"Ah, *lysoform* ?" . . . All those three physicians ironically laughed at the *lysoform*. "Well, it is very efficacious . . . commercially."

"And what about cauterisation ?" asked Fulai.

"I do not believe that such practice is advisable, replied the illustrious pharmacologist. "There are *viruses* which, hardly thirty hours after having being inoculated, have already irremediably reached the nervous centres. . . ."

"But, excuse me, Commendatore, I have read that the blood-stream moves more slowly than that . . ." Fulai ventured to remark.

"But not all *viruses*, dear sir, spread themselves through the blood. The *virus* of rabies, for example, spreads itself through the nerves, not through the blood. Bites on the face or on the soft ends of the fingers, which are very rich in nervous fibres, allow the invasion of the centres in less than thirty hours. Well, I suppose I cannot make a treatise on bacteriology here in a motor car, can I? . . ."

Professor Fulai did not speak any longer : not in consequence of those words—'*the virus of rabies spreads itself through the nerves*'—but because of a shock which chilled and paralysed him. From that shock—as if a black cloud in the sky—a storm came over him.

It was a single idea, suddenly grown within him, disproportioned, monstrous, which whirled through his brain—just like the mouse in the trap—sweeping away, dragging along, all the normal ideas of his life. "Stop !" cried Fulai to himself. Horrible invisible torture ! But he could not stop it. His brain was now deprived of brakes.

At his house, the excellent Battista had prepared the usual hygienic and delicate lunch, but the soup was already cold, and he had discreetly knocked three times at the door, saying :

"Lunch is ready, sir."

But the Professor stood with his eyes attentively fixed on a small dictionary, where he had read : *Rabies : a virulent illness common to men and certain animals, dogs, wolves, cats, etc., which manifests itself with nervous symptoms, then with coma, followed by death.*

"Battista," this name was uttered in an unusual voice—"have you found a dead mouse in my bedroom?"

"Yes, sir."

"Where is it now?"

"In the dust-bin."

"Well, you must go and find it in the dust-bin, and bring it to me," said Professor Fulai with shivering repugnance. "And if you cannot find it, call the dustman."

After an hour's work among the rubbish, Battista found it.

"Ah ! Well. I do not want to see it. Put it in a box."

Presently a man went out hurriedly : he carried death in the pocket of his overcoat.

* * *

The low red building, quite new, with *Istituto Antirabbico* in large characters, written on its front, rose in the middle of a small garden just outside the ramparts.

Fulai rang the bell at a small, half-closed door. A stout woman, in a long white apron, with upturned sleeves, let him in.

"Is Dr. R. in ?"

"He is in, but I do not know if he can see anybody."

"Show him this," and he produced his visiting card.

The woman disappeared. The Professor remained alone in a white, empty room, stuffy with heat and a strong smell of ether. In the midst of it, on a glass slab, there was an apparatus, and within the apparatus a rabbit was fixed, alive, scorched and bleeding on the forehead. Fulai shivered.

"You may come in," said the woman reappearing. She resumed her work about the rabbit, while the Professor was introduced into a small drawing-room by the young, elegant Doctor R.

"To what must I ascribe the honour of your visit, Professor ?"

The Professor smiled with all his white teeth. He tried to stand. He felt a great agitation.

"A strange case," he said, "a case for a novel, nay, for a fantastic story. (Just the literary kind that the Professor most despised.)

He had to tell everything ; and everything was quite justified when you come to think that the mice had gnawed that precious incunabulum of *Ars Moriendi* with the xylographs of Lorenzo Coster of Haarlem.

"Very good, but excuse me," said the Doctor, who, though young, spoke, or it seemed to the Professor that he spoke, with a nasty kind of pedantry—just as he, Fulai, was accustomed to

speak—"Excuse me, but how was this mouse able to bite you?"

"I took it by the caudal appendix, believing it was dead."

"But you ought not, excuse me, to have taken it by the tail ! In other words, you have cruelly treated the animal. . . ."

It was humiliating for such a great man to have to confess that he had cruelly treated such a small animal ; but, as he had the fixed idea in his mind that cruel treatment might have provoked rabies in the mouse, he was compelled to confess.

"Common people believe, as a matter of fact," said the young Doctor, "that bad treatment, thirst, or sexual abstinence, may engender rabies. But this opinion cannot hold."

"Well, and then?" . . . asked the Professor, who for the first time in his life heard himself associated with 'common people.'

"Then transmission is required, that is to say inoculation. We should therefore have to suppose that your mouse had been, in its turn, bitten by an already infected cat, which is rather unlikely."

"But it is not impossible," said Fulai, timidly.

"Quite so. It is not impossible," confirmed the Doctor with exasperating calm—and yet calm was one of the qualities that Fulai appreciated most.

"Yes, but what about the first origin of *virus rabicum*?" asked Fulai. And these two words *virus rabicum* gave him such a pang that he could scarcely utter them.

"As for the origin," replied the young Doctor with a smile on his closed lips, "you know more than I : *felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causam*, as Lucretius said."

The quotation was inexact for three reasons, but this did not matter a bit to Fulai, now.

"If such is the case, Doctor, I may believe that *rabies* can develop in animals, also under the action of some physical pain. . . ."

"If you like to believe so, you may."

"If I like ! If I like ! . . . Excuse me, I do not like such belief at all ! But, as it is not wholly irrational, considering

the obscure origin of this illness, I came to you to have an indisputable proof, a laboratory proof. . . .”

“Oh, if you like, yes, very willingly. But a bacterioscopic examination is necessary.”

“You mean, inoculate a rabbit like that one I have seen in the other room?” asked the Professor, sinking again into blind terror.

“We can do it in a quicker way,” said the young Doctor in a self-satisfied tone, caressing his beard. “We can make an histological examination, looking if there are in the brain the so-called *corpi of Negri*. But it would be necessary to have the material.” . . .

“The mouse, you mean?”

“Yes, but it must be well preserved. If decay has already invaded, more or less, the piece to be examined, the proof will be rather uncertain.”

“The thing only happened this morning . . .”

“Oh, excellent, then.”

What a strange sensation, this word “excellent” for such a tragic case ! Ah, the insensibility of men of science ! And yet he also, Fulai, enjoyed himself, in his insensibility, when he dissected the minds of the dead, by his criticism.

The Professor handed over the horrible little parcel.

The Doctor opened it, unwrapped the mouse, looked at it with pleasant attention.

“One would say that it had also been singed,” he said, looking up at Professor Fulai with inquisitive eyes.”

“It was my servant.”

“All right. You may come, or send somebody here tomorrow morning, and we shall be able to give you the reply you want.”

* * *

On the morrow, the young Doctor arrived with tranquil leisureliness, at the Institute, and found the Professor walking up and down in front of the door. He was bent and had livid marks under his eyes, which were unnaturally bright—and a reddish, unhealthy face. He stammered convulsively.

"You seem rather agitated," said the Doctor.

"Yes . . . rather," replied Fulai, making an effort to smile.

"I do not wonder. This is a very frequent case. We have to-day under observation forty-five people who have been bitten by dogs really infected, by hydrophobia. And still they come here quite happy and indifferent . . ."

"Happy, indifferent?" repeated automatically the Professor.

"To be sure ! Most of them come from the country—people who have the good fortune not to be accustomed to think. If, on the other hand, a man comes here who muses over hydrophobia, the most curious phenomena of self-suggestion may happen. All groundless fear ! Think only : out of three thousand people whom we have cured in this Institute, statistics give only two unsuccessful cases, that is to say, a mortality of 0.60 per cent."

"And I might be the third unsuccessful one ?" asked Fulai, who thought only of his own case.

"Your case ? Very good."

"Have you examined the mouse ?"

"Now we shall see. And you can see too."

The stout woman with white apron and upturned sleeves was busy round another rabbit. She took a small glass jar from a shelf and gave it to the Doctor. Then the Doctor and Fulai went into the laboratory.

"Now we shall see."

The young Doctor took off his coat, hung it on a hook, put down his cigarette on an ash-tray, uncovered a polished instrument—the microscope. He adapted the lenses, turned certain screws, finally looked into it.

(That little man was terribly calm.)

"Well ? Well ? Well ?" . . .

"As I told you yesterday : nothing ; negative results."

Professor Fulai had been for twenty-four hours in a state not easily describable ; all that mad and whirling idea in his brain ; all his organs—of respiration and digestion—felt painful, contracted, inactive ; his heart, on the contrary, was

beating furiously, like a horse that has gone mad ; his eyes, as if transfixed, did not let him sleep. A most deplorable condition ! Now, when the doctor said : *Negative results*, it seemed to Fulai that the mad ideas which had been whirling in his brain all the time had disappeared as if by magic, like a bat (which is a sort of horrible mouse) disappearing from the ceiling of a room which it had entered and round which it flew incessantly. Fulai also felt the delightful sensation of all his organs, up to then contracted, opening, and letting in the oxygen ; he felt the joy of living.

But it was only for a second. It came unfortunately into his mind to ask :

“Are you mathematically sure ?”

At this question the Doctor knitted his brow rather gloomily—to the great terror of Fulai, who was scrutinising his face.

The young Doctor, though belonging to another branch of human knowledge, was a follower of the same method as Professor Fulai. He affirmed nothing without a proof.

“Well, a negative histological examination,” said the Doctor gravely, “is not sufficient. It is necessary to inoculate a rabbit, to have the patience to wait, from a minimum of twenty days, to a maximum of four months—yes, four months !—and then we can reply with *mathematical* certainty. Excuse me, Professor, but . . . do you expect to know these things better than we, who live among them ? . . .”

A subdued discussion arose between the two scientists. One of them had studied papers, parchments, charts, manuscripts, papyri ; the other had studied pieces of anatomy, nerves, parenchymæ, the various kinds of cocci, had used the microscope : but neither had ever studied the big animal who is man. They had never observed with more apt eyes, that is with simpler, purer eyes, those which God gave us. Therefore the discussion between those scientists was somewhat bitter.

“But I tell you, Professor,” said the Doctor, “I tell you : have confidence in me ! You want the mathematical proof, I cannot produce it, nobody can produce it in less than four months’ time, and just so . . .”

Just in that moment the woman with upturned sleeves was bringing in a black rabbit, holding it by the ears. A sort of bloody and deadly cross had been marked between its ears. The woman put the rabbit in a cage with strong iron bars, where the animal, moving about, soon began to eat. The Doctor stuck on a label with the date 28 November, 19 , and said :

"If you will come here, Professor, in about eight days, you will see that this rabbit neither stirs nor eats. If, instead, we put in another rabbit which has been inoculated with the brain of your mouse, in four months' time you will find it quite lively and full of vitality as this one is now. I feel quite convinced, but as a scientist, I cannot give you a mathematical reply now ; nor can you ask it."

"As it is so"—said Fulai—"let us try the mathematical proof. Thus, afterwards, I shall feel more comfortable."

"Very good. I will have a nice rabbit inoculated, then," concluded the doctor.

"I thank you for your kindness, and please excuse me if I have been rather . . . animated in this discussion."

The Doctor accompanied the Professor as far as the little door, and waited until Fulai passed the gate of the small garden. Then the Professor turned round, and made a nice salute with his hat ; the young Doctor, in his turn, made a nice bow from the threshold ; and the little door was slowly closed.

* * *

Professor Fulai walked at a good pace at first. He was in the Avenue of the ramparts. From the big plane trees the leaves, yellow and dry, were falling.

Now for the first time Fulai looked at them, and a line of poetry, like the Knight of Death, blocked his way in the middle of the Avenue. It was a line from Homer :—

"Why do you ask my name and stock ?

Like that of the leaves, such is the stock of men."

He, Fulai, knew all about the "homeric question," but only to-day did he discover that Homer had a meaning different

from the "homeric question." Homer, with his blind eyes, blocked his way. Strange ! Homer, who has never existed, to block his way !

*"Why do you ask my name and stock ?
Like that of leaves, such is the stock of men."*

All without a name, then ? All like leaves, then ? Leaves ! Leaves become heaps of manure ; then new leaves, as Homer says—

"And the branchy forest renews them in Spring."

"But I am all right as I am. I do not want to be renewed, I do not !" And he thought of the old monks, who though alive, threw away their names. All without name, like leaves. Dante, too, when he knocked at the door of the monastery, did not tell his name.

* * *

At home, Professor Fulai found that he was waited for.

Young Professor Leviathan, neatly dressed, but rather narrow-minded, was his spiritual disciple. He had been sent to Madrid, whence he had returned with three variants of an old manuscript ; he had been to Berlin, where he had enriched the Dantesque commentary with a contribution on the *great-grandmother of Dante, Dante's Urgrossmutter*. Leviathan differed from Fulai perhaps in this, that Fulai dragged, along with his ponderous volumes, the mantle of stylistic elegance of the *cinquecento*, while Leviathan proceeded scientifically and with flat pedantry.

Leviathan was collaborating with Fulai to fill a real gap by studying the connections between Nietzsche and Leopardi. But this day Fulai had no wish to collaborate. He felt an immense disgust, more even than in plunging into 13th century literature. Nietzsche and Leopardi were, it is true, recent authors ; but only now Fulai realised that these two poets formed a tragic group in the embrace of death.

"We shall discuss this subject some other day, dear Leviathan."

"Are you perhaps not very well, Master ?" asked the mild voice of Leviathan.

"A little headache, in fact."

"One can see from your eyes."

"Are they bright?"

"I should say they are glittering."

"Glittering?" . . .

*

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Leviathan had gone and Fulai found himself alone with this desperate question : What shall I do ?

His pulse gave ninety-seven beats a minute. He felt something heavy in his brain, as if there were a leaden weight that kept his eyes wide open—just as they put certain leaden weights in the porcelain heads of dolls to keep their eyelids open.

"Well, let us go to the library," he said. But when he found himself at the corner of B. street and read *Biblioteca Nazionale* on the brass plate he was afraid.

The idea of studying gave him a deep disgust, as if he were a negligent schoolboy. And yet, *before*, it was so pleasing to him. His table, covered in green repp, with all his volumes, big volumes, little volumes, was religiously respected. This was his kingdom, where, on his entering, everybody would make a bow, and he would hear a flattering whisper : "That is Fulai." The distributors, like silent servants, put on his table incunabula, paper and parchment manuscripts. But on this day Fulai looked at these things with terror.

It seemed to him, he was wearing a diving-dress to plunge ten or fifteen yards deep—ten, fifteen centuries into the ocean of past ages. He saw all the dead of dead ages, alive—just as the diver sees gigantic corpses in a wrecked ship. Up to this day he had seen only dead men in the past, now he saw them living. He withdrew his eyes from the books with disgust.

He turned his eyes all round under his gold-rimmed spectacles.

There were the usual students, working at some research according to his instructions and method. But they seemed to him to be no longer real students, but rather, moles : they

opened small tunnels under the heap of centuries, to reach some university chair.

"Bring me a treatise," Fulai said to the distributor, "on hydrophobia."

The distributor came back with a book in full vellum : *A physic and medical essay by Monsieur Boissier de Sauvage, physician to the King of France, on the nature and cause of rabies—wherein are discussed the possible Preservators and Remedies, with a short appendix on the poisonous Animals of Italy—now for the first time translated from French into Italian—with privilege.*

"But who told you to bring me this stupid old thing ?" said Fulai.

As Professor Fulai never spoke *tumido ore*, the distributor was stupefied and all those present raised their heads, on hearing him speak aloud in the reserved room.

"Do not be angry, Signor Commendatore," whispered the distributor.

Fulai said nothing. He opened the old boards of the book, and his eyes fell on this chapter :

Section of corpses . . . The brain and the beginning of the spinal cord drier than usual ; the heart dry.

He shivered. He turned some pages and read : *the poison of rabies produces its greatest effects in the gullet . . .*

Perhaps . . . Yes, he felt his gullet contracted . . .

He went out of the library, not with his usual gait.

He went to a *tea-room*. There, at that time, are Countess Bosis and the wife of Senator D. They have tea and *petits-fours*—or "*pasticcetti*," as the purist Professor Fulai would say, correcting the two ladies. They are very intellectual ladies, and they admire Professor Fulai's wit. But the prospect of sitting still in that room, shining with gilt stuccos, in the style of (*Louis-quinze*, said the Countess ; "*Luigi decimoquinto*," Fulai would correct) was as painful to him as a dive into the library. Those glittering mirrors and stuccos gave him a sensation of terror. He felt that he would not be able to swallow the cakes, or *petits-fours* (now it was quite indifferent to him who to call them) because of his gullet.

He, Fulai, then found himself walking at a quick pace in the great, deserted Avenue of plane trees, outside the City Gates. But he was not thinking of Leviathan, nor of the National Library, nor of the Countess. The thing over which he was thinking—the only thing of which he felt compelled to think—was that whizzing idea of being hydrophobic. “I am a hydrophobic Professor.”—“But it is sheer madness to think so !” He forced his reason to reply, stopping from time to time. But the whizzing idea did not stop. There was a dreadfully logical demon within him which put before his mind all the possible cases, such as—“Is it not true, Professor Fulai, that in one way or another one must die ?”

The double file of big trunks of plane trees vanished before him in the grey background of an evening without any colour of sunset. The light of the town appeared at the other end of the Avenue like a whitish halo. But he was very far from the town. “I have run up here like a wandering dog,” he thought. He shivered at this simile, that he had unwillingly conceived. He wanted to go back, but he was afraid of the electric lights, just as much as of the shadows of the plane trees.

There was a faint light before him. Perhaps it was from the octroi place. He would go there. He would speak to those officials. But the light went further : it was the lantern of a cart moving slowly.

Presently he remembered that the Avenue led to the cemetery. *Lantern, fanale, feral, feralis !* Root : *bar, fero, I carry : la bara, the hearse !* A horrid, philological mixture ! He thought of those who cannot sleep in their own beds, and who voluntarily go to sleep under those cypresses . . .

He turned round and began to run desperately towards the city.

* * *

“Oh, you are all wet, sir ! You have gone out without your umbrella,” said Battista, when Fulai entered his house.

“As a matter of fact, I forgot to take my umbrella. Clear the table, Battista, because . . . I have already dined at the

Senator's. I meant to telephone you, dear Battista, but I forgot. I am sorry, dear Battista."

It was the first time Battista had ever heard that *dear* before his name. Was the Professor ill?

"Are you not very well, my master?"

Fulai was certainly a master, nay, a Sultan; nay, in Italy, the country where there is plenty of freedom,¹ Fulai practised a species of tyranny in the only sphere where freedom is good—on intelligence! Woe to those who had not the kind of intelligence Fulai had! Fulai, pleasantly and by stealth, but inexorably, would bar their careers. Oh, he was indeed a master, Fulai! But on that night the word "master" seemed strange to him.

"Battista, is the lamp in my bed-room well lit?"

But this word *lamp*, *lampas-lampados*, recalled to his mind the parable of the five wise virgins and the five foolish virgins. They were waiting for him on the threshold, raising their lamps, *for we know neither the day nor the hour*. . . . But is the whole of literature lugubrious? He had never noticed that before.

He put out the light. But darkness was as unpleasant as light. "Well, let us see: what is wrong with me? Fear. Of what am I afraid? Of dying." Even to die like Petrarch with a book in his hand was no longer attractive to him, now. And then Petrarch was seventy years old, and, besides, it was different for him, for he believed in a thing which is not dead: in the Virgin Mary—"may she receive my last breath in peace!" How lugubrious, after all, was also that poet! . . . "Well, when I am seventy we may think about such things! To think that only yesterday morning I was so well, so happy! Why on earth did I touch that cursed mouse?"

"But you must not be afraid, that is what you must not be!" he said to himself. He turned on the light, got out of his bed, pointing meanwhile a finger at himself in the middle of the night, in his night clothes. He saw himself reflected in the mirror of the cupboard. But that gesture seemed to him that

¹ This story was written about ten years ago. (E)

of a madman. *Erebus et Terror* stood before him : It was the bottle on the night-table shining. It seemed to him not to be drinkable. Fulai invoked *Logos* and *Bule*—Reason and Will—against *Erebus et Terror*. But Reason turned round and round like a *scarabeus* from which a wing had been torn ; and *Bule*—Will—was beaten.

“With the daylight—said Reason to Fulai, who felt terribly tired—perhaps *Erebus et Terror*, the two monsters, will disappear.”

At last the daylight came. Reason was able again to be master. But two big livid patches under Professor Fulai’s eyes bore testimony to the horrible night he had passed.

* * *

A strange force dragged him to the *Istituto Antirabbico*. He was absurd and grotesque, but he had no shame left to conceal his misery. That rabbit ! That rabbit was all the world to him. Fulai was haunted by this fixed idea : how is that rabbit now ?

“How is my rabbit ?”

“Very well, Professor,” replied the young Doctor.

“Do you think it will die ? I mean, of hydrophobia.”

“Not at all.”

“I feel very bad, Doctor,” and Fulai told him how he had spent the night.

“These are just the terrors of men of letters.”

Fulai, in fact, was not a man of letters, he was a scientist. The Doctor did not make any difference between the two quite separate functions of criticism and art. But that day Fulai did not pay attention to this.

The young Doctor was in a very good humour.

“Professor M. is just now in the laboratory. . . . I will tell him about your case. He will see you. Wait a moment, please.”

The happy Doctor did not even wait for Fulai’s reply. He left him in the hall.

Professor M. . . . was the Director of the University Clinic : a Great Man he, too, a man who knew through what fissures *Erebus et Terror* enter the brain, a man who framed

Will and Reason, who knew the brain as well as Fulai knew twelfth-century literature. The two Great Men had frequently greeted each other in the street ; but Fulai would never have dreamed that he would fall under the other's jurisdiction.

If he had been master of his own will, Fulai would have run away. But he had no will left.

"Come in, Professor," said the young Doctor. Fulai followed him.

Professor M. was there, white-haired, smiling very sweetly when he spoke—a real balsam of words. Never had Fulai addressed men of letters, either dead or alive, with such sweetness. Also his words made him wonder . . .

"Dear colleague," said Professor M., "our Doctor"—and he pointed to the young Doctor—"errs with the enthusiasm of a neophyte. I take the liberty of saying so, because he has been a student of mine. He lives confined in a laboratory, and he has the illusion of looking at men, while in fact, these are far away, and he merely sees guinea-pigs and rabbits. The man who makes experiments in a laboratory takes from nature only what he wants ; or rather, more modestly, he imitates nature as best he can. Now the maladies of men are quite a different thing from our experiments. It is Nature who imposes maladies on us, and, to try to reproduce them, we must know first in what they consist, and what their laws are. These laws certainly exist, but they are very difficult to know, and therefore we physicians must be extremely modest in our boasting. *Subtilitas naturae subtilitatem argumentandi multis partibus superat.* I tell you this to explain that the "mathematically," my friend uttered yesterday, was exact as far as rabbits are concerned, but little exact for men. Such things as perfect sciences do not exist. But, to the first mistake of that unfortunate *mathematically*, another was added : he ought not to have condescended to have a rabbit inoculated. The inoculated rabbit was, so to speak, the door through which has entered into you, not the *virus rabies*, but the terror of the *virus rabies*. This terror is, after all, an illness not less real than

rabies itself. And to-day, when, thanks to the immortal observations of Louis Pasteur, rabies is curable, believe me, fear is a more dangerous illness than the other. . . . Are you smiling, Professor ?”

Fulai was smiling. He thought he was well.

“Moreover, if there had been even the slightest possibility of infection, my friend the Doctor would have proposed at once the Pasteur cure, as an extreme precaution. Why did he not ? By an instinctive reasoning, through which he felt sure that there was no infection in your case.”

Thus spoke the great master. But Fulai in that moment did not feel ill any longer—or at least it seemed to him so. Certainly he had had horrible sufferings ; and he told of his great astonishment how, through a slight scratch such as that caused by the teeth of a mouse, such a dreadful idea could have entered his brain. In what part of the brain could such a dreadful idea dwell ? How can an idea make a man tremble, distract his attention from all other things, obscure the sun for him, hamper his will, his sleep, his smile ?

He continued :—

“My brain was, before, like a Swiss landscape, all clean and carefully well-ordered ; but now it has become like a place over which have passed storm, war, death. The idea of dying of hydrophobia has upset everything, in a manner unbecoming to a respectable man such as I still believe myself to be. No doubt that kind of death must be horrible, and I tried to avoid arguing, more or less, as you did, Professor. But the idea goes away for some time, and then returns. It returns with the insistence of the old demon in the mind of the ascetics of bygone times. It says : ‘May I come in ?’, and it is already in. ‘Remember,’ it says, ‘that Morgante, who was a giant, died of the bite of a small shrimp.’

“ ‘But that,’ I reply, ‘is a fable invented by the poet Pulci.’
“ ‘True ; but do you not remember that nice story of many years ago, in the *Giornale del Vespero*, about that American who died of hydrophobia because he had patted a little dog ?’

“ ‘But that is an exception—one out of a million !’ ‘Yes, you

are right : probably you will not die of hydrophobia, but you must agree, Fulai, that you have to die in one way or another !' And this idea remains fixed in my brain and does not want to leave me.

"But there is something worse still. All my peaceful books give me, now, a dreadful idea of time. Dante is like an abyss that frightens me. The manuscripts of the twelfth century give me a terror. I almost see time in a material way : I see it in the shape of a bottomless abyss. Its tremendous etymology is in my mind : time, that is *the endlessly going on, eternity absorbing everything*. Men have invented certain elegant divisions of time—age, hours, olympiads, kalendæ, months—as in certain buildings they put special screens to avoid dizziness in looking down : but it is, in fact, something continuous, and the abyss remains. Those lines of Leopardi, that I used to read indifferently—

And I think of eternity
And past ages,

now make me shudder. How was that boy Leopardi able to write these terrible things without dying ? Was he a great madman or a great wise man ? Was his thought physiological or pathological ? Which of the two : *to be or not to be*, is physiological, that is to say normal ? . . . And that rabbit . . . My life is that rabbit !"

The great old listener smiled. Fulai was pleased with that smile, though it meant derision of his words.

"My dear colleague," said Professor M., "our therapeutic science goes little farther than an aperient and an anodyne. I wish I were able to force certain laws of nature ; and yet I also, just as the humblest physician, have at my disposal only anodynes or aperients. But in your special case we have a remedy : visit from time to time your rabbit. As our friend, the Doctor has committed the sin of inoculating it, let him also do penance by letting you visit it."

"And shall I find it always in good health ?"

"With *mathematical* certainty."

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Fulai went home almost frisking with joy. The great physician had taken away his fear. Just as when he said : "Mother ! Mother, come here ! . . ." And he saw his mother, in the past, when he was a little boy, and his poor mother loved him so much, cured him of his maladies—simple maladies, obedient maladies. . . . She sent them away.

So had done also the white-haired doctor. Goodness ! Strange word ! A word that mothers say to children, and which then disappears . . .

"Yes, dear Battista, to-day I am really better. For instance, I notice that this broth is rather weak."

"Then shall I prepare, sir, a cutlet *sautée* or '*saltata*' as you were wont to say ?"

"Very well, Battista. A little cutlet, *sautée* or *saltata*—which is the same. And also a drop of Barolo wine. Do you know, Battista, that this Barolo has been very well stored ? You are a model of a servant, a good man—are you not, Battista ? Come, you also must taste some of this exquisite Barolo."

"Professor Fulai," said a xylograph of Master Lawrence Coster in the precious *incunabula* of *Ars Moriendi*, "shall we indulge in a little meditation ?"

"Gloomy meditation be hanged !" said Fulai. "I want to make merry !"

* * *

On the following morning Fulai woke up after a long slumber without nightmares.

In fact, the heavy leaden cap that he had felt on his brain was now beginning to subside. But a strange confusion of ideas still persisted. He tried to read, but he was not able to study, he could not concentrate. His head had been, before, like a perfectly ordered file of notes. Now, on the contrary, each schedule had become pregnant with grave meanings. In each schedule there was a man, who had once lived ; there was his toil, his work ; and all those innumerable works formed a heavy weight, and all this weight formed a terrible lightness: *Vanitas* ! But Fulai's mind would run to the *Istituto Antirab-*

bico, where his rabbit was. In order to feel well he had to see his rabbit.

The young Doctor was not in. There was only the woman with the white apron and upturned sleeves.

"We have inoculated a nice white rabbit just now," said she. "You shall see how lively it is, how it eats !"

"Is that so ? Is it really lively ? Does it really eat ?"

Well, now he felt better on hearing this news.

They went down to a sort of cellar.

"Goodness ! What is that bloody thing down there ?" asked Fulai, frightened.

"The head of a dog, sir. Every day we have some new one. You are too sensitive."

"Yes, I am too sensitive."

"Here we are," said the woman opening a small door.

It was a grey, cold room, with iron cages all round. In each cage there was either a rabbit or a guinea-pig—all with that bloody cross on their heads.

"Look, sir, this one begins."

"What ? Begins what ?"

"The paralysis. Do you see ?" And the woman with a small stick between the bars lifted the poor animal, which could not stand on its feet, and fell heavily.

"This other will begin to-morrow," she went on methodically.

"But it is eating !"

"Yes, but don't you see that it does not run any more ?—Oh, let us throw away this !"

There was in a cage a dead rabbit over which another was squatted.

"No, don't do that !" cried Fulai. "The living one might get out ! And then, are you not afraid of being bitten ?"

"I am accustomed to it," and the woman put an arm into the cage, took off the dead rabbit, and threw it in a heap of sawdust.

That woman seemed to Fulai more courageous than Marfisa and Camilla.

"And my rabbit?"

"Here is your rabbit."

"Ah, my rabbit," said Fulai who had been thinking of all those instruments of life and death. "My rabbit . . . Goodness ! Look ! But it is squatting like the others!" exclaimed he, shivering.

"Yes, but don't you see its lively eyes, its smooth fur ? It is the finest of the whole lot. We call it Pipin. Look : Pipin !"

And she had scarcely touched it with her small stick, when the rabbit began to move quite lively.

"It is eating !" cried Fulai, full of admiration and happiness.

"I am sure it is. Look, it has finished its bran."

Fulai was now breathing freely. He saw his rabbit with its long ears standing, while all the others were all ruffled, with drooping ears, motionless, horrible.

"Do they die like that?"

"Yes."

"Then they die calmly."

"But the guinea-pigs bite each other. Look at these. They bite the bars !"

"And men do the same ? Have you seen some ?"

"Ah yes ! It is horrible. They must be tied up, sometimes. They say themselves : 'Get away ! Get away ! Now I am going to bite !' "

Fulai felt as if a halter were tightened round his neck. He wanted to run away and at the same time he wanted to know. He asked :

"Is it true that they are afraid of water ?"

"Yes, sir, sometimes the very sound of water running from a tap is sufficient to give a fit of convulsions."

Fulai would not leave that place. He wanted to know so many things.

"All the dogs that they sent have hydrophobia ?"

"Almost all. Look at these rabbits and guinea-pigs : they can tell you."

"But my rabbit has not, has it ?"

"No. All except yours."

"Very good. But do you tell the men who follow the cure that their own rabbit is dead or ill?"

"We say nothing. Besides, most of them are peasants or children, who do not know about these things."

"And if somebody knows and wants to see?"

"We do not allow him to come here. You, sir, have come because the Professor has let you."

"And those who are really infected, recover by the Pasteur cure?"

"Yes, except those who die."

Fulai gave a very good tip to the woman.

"Look here," he said going out, "could you not put my rabbit in a better and more sunny room? You see, in this sort of cellar it might catch some other kind of illness, and this would trouble me. I will amply reward you if you treat my rabbit with the greatest care."

* * *

Battista, on the morning, was ordered to let flow the water from the tap.

"This sound does not trouble me at all. I am very well!"

Also to drink his Barolo in the shining glass gave him no trouble.

"Very good! But it is really a shame that a man who has been always courageous should now be so afraid. Compare your case," he said to himself, "with that of Dante. All against him, so that if they had found him they would have burnt him alive mercilessly; and he against all! He hurled all his enemies into hell among those roaring flames, with no fear of being prosecuted for libel. And then he goes all alone in search of eternity, of Nirvana, of the absolute, of God—he, alone!"

And he sails on the sea of spirit, with full sails.

Oh you who sail in the small ship,
Return to see your shores again.

And it looked to him as if Dante was sending back him and his Leviathans.

"You may go, you who are wise and strong," said Fulai to Dante, "you may go to find God. As for me I would rather remain here."

* * *

Oh, Professor Fulai was now much better ; and the more time passed the better he was. When at last those eighty days had passed, he was excellently well. He was again normal as before. Perhaps a little more scrupulous about his body, his skin, his hygiene ; but, for all the rest, just as before. His library—the library which he carried in his head—no more weighed on him like a crown of lead ; his scheduled notes had become again as light as leaves slightly quivering under a breeze.

Perhaps, if Battista had been asked, he might have replied that his master had become even a little more pedantic.

"But, Battista," Fulai would say in his shrill voice, "do you know that the two cats are making the house dirty ? And then the rabbit !"

Because Fulai, in his gratitude, had wanted to reward Pipin—the rabbit—for its kindness in not having been ill during those famous eighty days—the days of Fulai's torture. Therefore he had redeemed it from a sure death, and kept it in his house. But how dirty was that stupid Pipin with its round red eyes !

"My dear Leviathan," said Fulai to the author of *Dante's Urgrossmutter*, "believe me : it is not so difficult to become like Leopardi. It is a story I will tell you some day."

(From "Novelle D'Ambo i Sessi." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)



GABRIELE D'ANNUNZIO

(1864-)



CINCINNATUS

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

HE was not tall of stature ; spare, flexible as a reed ; with a leonine head slightly inclined to the left, covered with a wild wood of chestnut hair which came down to his shoulders in curls and snarles, sometimes streaming in the wind like a mane. He wore a beard like a Nazarite, and left it untrimmed and full of tiny bits of straw. His eyes were always downcast, looking at the tips of his bare feet. When he raised them to anyone's face, they inspired terror ; there was something strange and indefinable about them ; sometimes they seemed the eyes of a fool ; at certain moments the eyes of a man with fever ; now they made you think of the green water in a stagnant ditch, and then of the bright flash of a Toledo sword.

He had an old red jacket, thrown across his shoulders like a Spanish cloak worn with an arrogant air, which made him look somehow dashing and lordly. People called him *Cincinnati*, and said he had a bee in his bonnet ; then they spoke vaguely of love betrayed, of a blow with a knife, of a flight . . .

When I first knew him in '76 I was thirteen years old. He attracted me. In the hot summer days, when the great piazza was flooded with sun, and on the burning pavements there was no living creature to be seen except a few stray dogs, and no noise save the monotonous, wearing, strident sound of the knife-grinder's wheel, I used to stand for half an hour at a

time watching Cincinnatus from behind the half-closed blinds. He would pass by slowly, under the midday sun, with the air of a bored nobleman ; sometimes he would creep up quite close to the dogs, very softly, so as not to be noticed ; he would pick up a stone and cast it lightly in their midst ; then turn away, pretending to be invisible. The dogs would gather round him, wagging their tails, while he burst into short childish peals of laughter, well content. And I laughed too.

One day I took courage. When I was at my window, I put my head out and called "Cincinnatus !"

He turned quickly, saw me, smiled. I caught up a pink from a vase and flung it to him. We were friends from that day thenceforward.

He called me Curlylocks. One Saturday evening, I was standing alone on the bridge watching the fishing fleet come home. There was a superb July sunset all scarlet and gold clouds ; towards the sea the river shone and trembled with most vivid light, under the hills the banks shadowed the water with green, casting in the reflection of their trees, groves of cane, thickets of reeds, tents of giant poplars whose heads seemed to sleep in the burning air. The boats were making port slowly, with their great sails set of orange-coloured red, striated, or arabesqued in black. Two had already dropped anchor and were unloading their fish. There floated shorewards on the wind the sound of sailors' voices and the fresh odour of the rocks.

Turning quickly, I saw Cincinnatus before me. He was all in a sweat, with his right hand behind his back as if he were hiding something, and his mouth was lit by the familiar smile of a laughing boy.

"Oh, Cincinnatus !" I cried, holding out my pale little hand to him, joyfully.

He stepped forward and held out to me a fine posy of flaming poppies and golden ears of corn.

"Thank you, thank you ! How lovely they are !" I cried, taking them.

He drew his hand across his brow, wiping away the sweat which was running down, looked at his dripping fingers, looked at me, laughed.

"Poppies are red and stand in the midst of yellow corn, there in the fields. I saw them, I took them, I brought them to you, and you said, how lovely, Cincinnatus took them from the fields. The sun was there, like a fire."

He spoke submissively, with pauses between his words. He made an effort to follow the thread of his thought ; a thousand confused images gathered in his mind ; he snatched at two, three, the least unsubstantial, the most coloured ; and then the others flew away. You could see this in his eyes. I looked at him curiously, for he appeared beautiful to me. He noticed it at once, turning his head the other way towards the fishing-boats.

"The sail !" he said thoughtfully, "There are two sails, one above, and one below, in the water."

He did not seem to understand that the one below was a reflection. I explained it to him as best I could ; he listened to me enchanted, but probably he did not understand. I remember that the word *diaphanous* struck him.

"Diaphanous," he murmured, strangely, and smiled, and then went on staring at the sails.

The petal of a poppy fell into the river. He watched it until it had gone.

It is going far, far away," he said, with an indescribable melancholy in his voice, as if the petal were beloved by him.

"From what village are you ?" I asked, after a minute's silence.

He turned away to where the sky had become the colour of beryl, very pure. The violent mountains shewed against the horizon like a recumbent cyclops. Further away, on the river, there stretched the iron bridge, cutting the sky up into little pictures, at the back of the scene, under the bridge, the green of the trees had grown dark. From the barracks came the mingled sound of shouts of laughter, of bugle calls.

"I had a white house, yes, I had. By the side was a great

orchard where peaches grew. In the evening Tresa used to come. Beautiful. Her eyes . . . but he . . ."

He broke off abruptly, some dark thought flashing through his brain ; his eyes were sombre.

Then he grew serene again, bowed deeply, and walked away singing.

"Amoi, amoi, accirecheme sa rame."

After that I saw him very often. When he passed by in the road, I always called him to give him something to eat. Once I offered him a few pennies which my mother had given me. He looked very serious, pushed them away with a disdainful gesture and turned his back on me. That evening I met him just outside Porta Nuova. Coming up to him, I said :

"Cinnatus, forgive me !"

He fled like a tracked animal, and was lost among the trees.

But the next morning he was waiting for me at my door, and smiling boldly, held out to me a fine bunch of marguerites. His eyes were wet and his lips trembled, poor Cinnatus !

Another time, towards the last days of August, we were both sitting at the end of the avenue when the sun had already gone to rest behind the mountains. Over the vast sleeping plain you could hear from time to time voices and indistinguishable sounds far, far away. The dark fringe of the pine wood stretched out towards the sea, the moon shaded like copper rose slowly up the sky among fantastic clouds.

He looked at the moon, murmuring in a child-like way, "Look, now you can see it and now you can't see it. Now you can see it, now you can't see it."

For a moment he considered.

"The moon. It has eyes and a nose and a mouth like a human being. And who knows that it is thinking about, who knows . . ."

He began to hum a song from Castellamare, a song with long sad cadence, such as are heard in our hills in the flaming nights of autumn, after the vintage. From afar off we could see approaching quickly through the dusk the two lamps of the engine looking like the two staring eyes of some monster.

The train passed rumbling and puffing out smoke, emitting its sharpest whistle as it crossed the iron bridge. Then silence returned to the vast and shadowed land.

Cincinnatus had risen to his feet.

"Go, go, go," he cried, "Far away, far away, black, long like a dragon, with the fire inside you that the devil put there, that the devil put."

I shall always have clear before my imagination the way he stood at that moment.

The train's sudden eruption into the profound silence of nature had arrested him. All the way home he was dreaming.

One beautiful afternoon in September we went down to the sea. The infinite expanse of deep, blue water stood out against the opalescent horizon, shining as with lacquer, the fishing barques were sailing in pairs ; they seemed like great birds of some unknown species, with their yellow and vermilion wings. Along the shore behind us lay the tawny sand hills, then to the rear again, the sea-green mass of the willow plantation.

"The sea, huge, blue !" he said softly, as if speaking to himself in accents of wonder and fear. "Huge, huge, and there are fishes who eat men. There is Orcus in his cage of iron ; he is there shouting, but no one hears and he can never come out. At night the ship goes by, which means death to anyone who sees it."

Then he stopped. He went down on the shore, so that the tiny white waves bathed his feet. Who can tell what passed through his poor sick mind ? He perceived snatches of far-off shining worlds, he saw sheaths of colour, something vast, limitless, mysterious ; his reason, following after these vain shadows, lost itself.

His disconnected phrases, almost always picturesque, allowed one to guess that much.

As we were coming home, he kept silence most of the way. I looked at him and my heart said many strange things.

"You have a mother in your house, who waits for you and kisses you," he whispered at last in a low voice, as he took my hand.

The sun was going down in a clear sky behind the mountains and the river was full of reflections.

"And you, where is yours?" I asked, the tears ready to fall from my eyes.

He saw two sparrows in the road ; he picked up a stone, aimed as if he had had a gun in his hand, and flung it far. The sparrows flew like arrows.

"Fly ! Fly !" he cried, watching their flight into the pearly sky and laughing aloud, "Fly ! Fly!"

For many days I had noticed a change in him. He seemed to be full of fever. He would race across the fields like a colt until he fell breathless to the earth or would lie for hours curled up on the ground, motionless, his eyes fixed in the glare of the burning midday sun. Towards evening he would throw his red cloak over his shoulders and promenade up and down the piazza with long slow steps, like a Spanish grandee. He avoided me, bringing me neither poppies nor marguerites, and I suffered from his neglect. The gossips declared he had bewitched me. One morning, however, I went determinedly to meet him. He did not raise his eyes, and he blushed red as fire.

"What is the matter?" I cried, excited.

"Nothing."

"It is not true."

"Nothing."

"It is not true."

I saw that he was looking past me with flame in his eyes. I turned. Standing on the threshold of a shop was a fine peasant girl.

"Tresa !" murmured Cincinnatus, growing pale. I understood. The wretched man imagined that in this girl he had found again the siren from his own land, she who had already confounded his reason !

Two days later, they met in the piazza. He came smiling to her and whispered :

"You are more beautiful than the sun !"

And she slapped him full in the face.

There were some urchins near, who began to mock and jeer at Cincinnatus, left there alone, thunderstruck, white as a sheet. Cabbage-stalks began to fly ; one caught him in the face. He turned on the boys, roaring like a wounded bull, and, catching up one of them, flung him to the ground as if he had been a bale of rags.

I saw him pass under my windows, between two policemen, handcuffed, with the blood pouring down his beard, bent, vanquished, trembling, while the people jeered. I watched, with my eyes full of tears.

As luck would have it, the boy escaped with a few bruises, and Cincinnatus was out of prison again in a day or two.

Poor Cincinnatus, he was unrecognisable ! He had become sombre, suspicious, angry. I saw him sometimes, of an evening slinking as fast as he could go, like a dog, down some dark and dirty little back way.

Then, one lovely morning in October, full of cobalt blue and sunshine, they found him on the railway line by the bridge, so mutilated that he was nothing but a mass of bleeding flesh. One leg, struck right off, had been dragged by the train wheels for twenty paces or more. From the chinless head, with the blood matted in the hair, two greenish eyes stared terrifyingly.

Poor Cincinnatus ! He had wanted to see from near by the monster that goes on and on—as he used to say—far, far away, the monster long like a dragon which has fire inside put there by the devil.

(From "Terra Vergine.")



harméd, for it sometimes helps to set a thief to catch a thief. And in an attitude as of remission he waited for the rest of the news.

His brother took breath, sighed and went on—

“The Austrians are out of Milan—Emmanuel and Napoleon arrived there yesterday, together.”

“In Milan?” exclaimed the priest standing erect, his eyes blazing, his arms taut, leaning forward; his attitude now bespoke incredulity, and at the same time reproach for having delayed this portentous news.

“Together—yesterday—on horseback—but . . .” Sylvester added without mitigating his anger—“it is too early yet for us to sing the *Te Deum* ! To-morrow, or, at the latest, the day after to-morrow, we shall be caught between three fires—to the north, the Garibaldians ; beyond the Mella, the French and the Piedmontese ; on this side—the Austrians. Do you think the Austrians beaten like a pack of curs ? The Emperor himself is in command of them now ; d’you think he’s a *Giulay* ? And Austria is Austria ! Don’t forget it—Austria is Austria !”

Don Cæsar was not listening ; he seemed to be praying. His brother went on shouting.

“It’s too early yet for the *Te Deum* ! And meanwhile d’you know what they’re doing, those who have any love for their goods around here ? They’re putting them in safety ! And as for us ?”

The priest only answered.

“God will protect His church.”

Sylvester retorted,

“The French and the Piedmontese would steal the chalice and the Host in it ! And can you imagine they’ll have any scruples about sacking the presbytery ? And, what of my wheat, in the granary ? And that timber there ?” He was pointing to a dark pile seen from the window, near the kitchen-garden. “And they won’t touch anything, because you will say :—I’m a Liberal ! because you will cry ‘Long live France ! Long live Garibaldi !’ ”

Don Cæsar, now pale, murmured :

"Don't be afraid . . ."

"I, afraid? Who told you I'm afraid?"

"Emmanuel and Napoleon are honest, God-fearing men," went on his brother, "they'll let neither their own soldiers nor others plunder as the barbarians used to do."

Sylvester now became sarcastic.

"Oh, of course not! Their troops are so polite! It will be a pleasure if they visit us! Pray come in! Allow me! What little we have, we will offer it to them ourselves, willingly, for the sake of liberty, for the sake of Italy! Would you like the corn? Would you like the pig, the hens, the horse? Pray take them, take them! A nice blaze? Set fire to the wood pile! Will you have. . . . In the presbytery there is also a young girl—the priest's niece . . . my daughter."

At that precise moment Ermelinda, the young girl in question, came to say supper was ready; and the sight of her sufficed to stem her father's ghastly jesting. His look and his tone changed, the merchant turned to his brother, and ended:

"I've already eaten at Verolanuova, and I'm going to bed. But, for the love of heaven, don't go and upset my daughter too, so that she takes it into her head to copy Judith! It is harder to chop off Francis Joseph's head than your Holofernes."

And grumbling in reply to Don Cæsar's light smile and "Good night," Sylvester went off to his room.

But it was destined that, instead of passing a good night, he should pass a bad one. The heat and his own thoughts soon began to make him turn and toss from side to side.

"My brother must be mad! He reads sacred history so much that Nabuchodonosor and Holofernes, Gideon and Machabeus have made him lose his sense of discernment, and he preaches the wonders of Syria and Canaan in such times as ours! We must love our country? And who wouldn't like to be rid of foreign domination? But to bring in the French to drive the Austrians out (if they *are* driven out) is folly. It's like jumping from the frying-pan into the fire! They say: Napoleon will make Emmanuel King of Italy;

"*gratis et amore*" just as a friendly help ; as if the kings and sovereigns of the world were the same as other men ! But supposing it were so—supposing Francis Joseph did refuse to cut such a figure as Giulyay and did turn tail rather than come to blows with that Machabean MacMahon, or with that Canaanite Garibaldi—supposing Emmanuel did become King of Italy. What then ? It will be the same as when a man has a handful of land and buys an estate. Debts upon debts ! And *we* shall have to pay them. Flayed alive ! Isn't it worse than being ruined ? And meanwhile the harvests are spoilt. Wheat, corn—everything trampled by horses, and crushed under the wheels of the waggons ; poverty and starvation ! As for commerce, no one thinks of it now ; you can't make a penny ; whoever had anything has lost it, and long live liberty !"

And indeed all his debtors were patriots. That some day the miller at Verolanuova—who still owed him 150 crowns for a load of corn—had embraced him, scattering flour over him, crying, "We are free, long live Italy !" And you couldn't spoil such joy by reminding him of accounts to be settled. And then the undertaker at Leno who owed him 400 crowns for wood ? "My dear Sylvester, while the war lasts there's no work done and no money earned. But we're winning, thanks be to God ! The day will come when we'll be working for the new Government !" Oh, of course, who knows what a time of plenty that will be ! And worst of all, the broker at Bagnolo, with the excuse of buying arms for the National Guard, he had kept the £80 due as earnest for the purchase of rice, and because he, Sylvester, had asked for them, at the inn, he had stormed at him—traitor ! enemy to your country ! Instead of his pounds he, Sylvester, had very nearly had a good dose of blows.

And with these, the other debts he could not claim amounted to such a sum that made poor Carretti puff, and toss and groan, as he thought of it. He bemoaned the fate of his daughter, whose dowry he had worked so hard to provide ; he bemoaned his own fate, and that of his fellow-merchants,

being dragged into ruin by politics ; like a good Christian he even bemoaned the fate of his enemies, who had dug such a pit beneath themselves.

What a life he had led these last two months ! In the neighbouring villages and towns where he had to go on business, the demonstrations of the fanatics had, since the very beginning filled him with the apprehension of the colossal, irreparable disaster. And he, trying to counsel moderation, and vainly repeating, "If everyone did as I do, there wouldn't be any need to change Governments, and to kill off your neighbour ; if everyone worked and went to bed at eight, as I do, without engineering conspiracies and speaking ill of our superiors, the Austrians wouldn't bother us so much. Permission to buy and sell, to earn and to let earn, to eat, drink and sleep with an easy conscience has never been taken from *me* by the Austrians. Could you wish for more ? Many thanks ! But it's afterwards you always have to pay the piper ! War, my lads, has always been a curse, a punishment sent by God."

Nothing of the sort ! Now war was becoming a boon—Hurrah !

And he, whose spirit had, for years and years, been softened and tempered by the necessity of his trade, by the habit of forcing his will to submit in order to make that of others submit, by the art of reconciling the most adverse opinions in business affairs, now, in these new crises, suffered an anguish, a torment that was daily increasing to an angry exasperation and despair. And above all it drove him mad to think that the few who did agree with him were the very ones he despised : egoists, misers, rogues posing as honest men, spies, and cowards. He always escaped from them. But he always came home convinced that, though he was neither a miser nor a rogue nor a coward, he was truly right. And what comfort did he receive at home ? Nabuchodonosor and Gideon ! Holofernes and Judas Machabeus and Judith ! Even Ermelinda was moved by these stories !

"But now it's all over !" the poor man repeated to himself. "To-morrow or the day after at the latest the Assyrians and

the Canaanites will run us all through with their bayonets—me, my daughter, and my reverend brother. Let's hope at least that the Almighty Father, for love of Italy and Victor Emmanuel, will forgive us our sins !”

With this hope and prayer in his heart Sylvester Carretti was at length on the point of falling asleep when,

“Jug, jug, jug, jug, jug.”

That was the last straw ! The nightingale—In the direction of the cemetery a nightingale seemed to have decided, for some nights past, to keep him company.

II

The cemetery at Porzano, alongside the presbytery, was separated from the road by the ditch, and a crumbling, broken down wall, the prey of bryony and bindweed ; a solitary cypress grew in one corner. There, from amongst the thick foliage of the tree the nightingale, perhaps in the gladness of recent paternity, modulated its song, and, trilling, poured forth the notes of its joy, and the joy of its art, raising them limpid to heaven, sending them forth sweetly into the moonlight. And from that abode of death a thousand souls seemed to rise up and bless life and love, in one voice.

But what emotion rose to the heart of that young unmarried woman of twenty-eight as she listened, from the presbytery ; she who had never known love, had never, even in dreams, felt the gladness of life ? And if she too now and then thought the nightingale had sung enough for that night, hark—another, nimbler, more varied hymn to the beauty and the joys of nature suffused with the light of the moon and of the stars. Oh, to fly far, far away, to love !

And thus, next morning, at breakfast Ermelinda could not restrain her praise of the nightingale—

“How well it sings !”

“Blessed creature of God !”—was the fervent exclamation of her uncle, the priest—And, turning, with thought and look, to his irate brother, he added : “Perhaps God wants to send

us a message through her ; to tell us that, in spite of the hatreds and the wars of men, the flow of His mercy is uninterrupted."

Sylester only answered :—

"It seems to me God has given us the night for sleeping, and that at least the animals should let Christians sleep. If your nightingale disturbs me again to-night I'll see to getting rid of it myself."

Ermelinda said nothing, but took out her handkerchief. Strangely enough, though so thin and dried up, as it were, that girl always had tears ready in abundance, and any emotion, however slight, whether of grief or happiness, made them flow ; the big tears came rolling down her cheeks now in surprising profusion. Her uncle, however, was smiling, and meanwhile Sylvester went on grumbling. At length he got up and went out with the determination of a man bent on some dread and tremendous purpose, from which nothing can turn him.

In heaven's name ! Where was he going ? Where had he gone ? When would he come back ? How long would he be ?

What a long time he was gone ! He came home at midday, armed like an assassin ; with a weapon which by reason of its old-fashioned form, could have been at the same time a wicket, a rifle, and an arquebus, and which the town carpenter had brought out from some impenetrable hiding-place, as a sign of his patriotism. He had let him have it, on account of a certain debt, saying :—

"You've nothing to fear with this. All you've got to do is to aim straight !"

"Heaven help us ! What are you going to do ?" asked Ermelinda, weeping afresh at the thought of the death, now inevitable, of the nightingale.

Her father replied fiercely :

"I'm going to clean it."

He asked for oil and tow, and set to work.

"Take care !" warned Don Cæsar—"Don't run any risks for the sake of a mere trifle."

"A mere trifle?" thundered Sylvester, who had completely forgotten the bird, and was quivering as he felt the fierceness within him. "Nowadays, for you and for the others it's a fine thing to go and kill your neighbour: and I'm not to be allowed to defend myself against thieves, even if they are French? Haven't I the right to defend my skin, my blood, a priest, an honest girl? Let them come! Even Napoleon—or rather, even Garibaldi!—I'll get him! Wait and see!"

He had finished cleaning the gun, and was loading it with enough small shot and bits of lead to shatter at one go any who should venture to invade the presbytery. Not in vain had he heard that morning in the village that the allies had already crossed the Mella, and that the Austrians were retreating by way of Montichiari; and it didn't seem at all unlikely that some one of the pursuers, perhaps Napoleon or even Garibaldi, should unwisely attempt a short visit.

Soon afterwards the bell-ringer and the villager who looked after the parish church came to confirm the grave news. The French were at Bagnola; the Austrians were trying to break down the bridges of the Seriola, the stream near Porgano, as they had done at the Mella.

"I saw them myself, guarding Devil's Bridge," declared the villager.

And it was true. From the windows they could all make out large patches of white in the direction of the stream—the Austrians. Beyond them, far off, patches of red were advancing in rapid confusion through the trees—the French.

"We're in for it now," said the peasant.

"God help us," moaned Ermelinda.

"Shut the windows!" urged the bell-ringer. "I'll go and see to the church and the sacristy."

Sylvester was silent, trembling at the thought that that day he was to damn his soul, with that blunderbuss that hung by his side. And Don Cæsar, in the feeble light of a lamp, knelt to pray before a figure of the Madonna. Meanwhile the peasant was telling Sylvester what honest fellows these Frenchmen were! They wouldn't be denied anything, true,

but they paid—hay and corn ; flour and wood—all was paid for, and in gold.

All mere fables fit for simpletons ; tales to be recounted to Don Cæsar, not to a man who knew how to use a blunderbuss and to aim straight !

And suddenly there came a burst of quick shots, rending the air. Then, after a moment of silent suspense—boom ! a dull, heavy thud, that shook the house from its very foundations.

“Dynamite !” exclaimed the loquacious peasant, well-informed on all points, like a general. “But Devil’s Bridge is tough ! The devil built it !”

There followed a fresh discharge of the same rapid, short, crisp shots, then again a silence that seemed long and tragic.

Thus the fighting went on, at intervals. And it lasted hours and hours. For a long while the Austrians, on the left bank of the Seriola, resisted the Zouave regiment, sent from Bagnolo to guard the bridges over the stream. But, the attempt to blow it up having failed, Devil’s Bridge was destined to remain in the hands of the French. The Austrian attack became futile, and, gradually, towards evening, it ceased.

The peasant and the bell-ringer, weary of beating their breasts at every discharge—“*mea culpa ! mea culpa !*”—had quietly made their way out. The priest went down to the church, in order to breathe more freely, and Sylvester and his daughter, reassured now by the uninterrupted calm, went up into the loft to view the situation from opposite windows.

On one side the Austrians could be seen, in disorderly bands, retreating along the road to Ghedi ; on the other side, more Austrians, in fewer numbers and smaller groups, were moving towards Leno, on the Porzano road. Some were making their way hastily past the presbytery, at the back, and taking short cuts across the fields.

But suddenly Ermelinda opened wide her mouth to utter a shriek of horror, and stood with her mouth open, silent. There are several kinds of heroism ; that was one. Remembering that her father, who fortunately had his back to her, still had the blunderbuss by his side, she was silent. The

curs ! . . . three or four Austrians in a few seconds had scattered something black around the wood pile, and the flames shot up ! The girl was silent till the incendiaries were out of reach. Then—

“The wood’s on fire,” she yelled.

“My wood ! my wood !”—shouted Sylvester. Like an enraged lion he rushed to and fro in the loft, finding no one he could kill. He was panting and growling. Behind him, the tearful Ermelinda, to comfort him, was repeating :

“The Austrians did it ! The Austrians did it !”

III

And Don Cæsar said little harm had been done. With great difficulty, they had managed to save a few logs only from the wood pile ; and he said it had been a little sacrifice to the sacred cause of independence !

And to make it worse, the peasant, who had come to put out the fire, added fuel to Sylvester’s wrath, declaring that the Austrians were following their usual course of action ; they would cut down the bridges over the Chiese as well. Happy the man who could put his wood out of range of their fire and sell it to the French, who paid for it ; and if it was for bridges they paid cash in gold.

Worn out by the fury of his passion Sylvester could only swallow a little soup at supper. Even his white wine, twenty years old, and which filled a goodly number of bottles in the cellar, the wine kept only for great occasions and sung Masses, even that seemed bitter. And in bed, that evening, he went to sleep at once, but what a dream he had !

The presbytery was on fire. He was running away, and four or five devils dressed as Uhlans caught him as he was crossing the field, tied him to a tree, and made ready to fire—Oh ! dear ! No ; the Austrians were changing—into Piedmontese ! No, into Garibaldians ! Ah ! they were hastening to set him free ; they were dancing round him ; they were making him dance too, till he was breathless. Then, alas ! the Gari-

baldians became French, and these, armed with knives, caught him again, stripped him, and began flaying him, to the sound of a strange music, which, beginning far away, drew ever nearer and nearer.

The anguish made him start up in bed. And he heard

“Jug, jug, jug, jug.”

Devil take the bird ! The song of the nightingale, far from diminishing, seemed to increase the agony of his dream, re-awakening his sense of reality, renewing almost violently the force of his memory, rekindling afresh his wrath. He felt an irresistible need for vengeance, for some resolute, savage action. He had had enough ! He got up, drew on his trousers, and, without waiting to put on his shoes, went downstairs and out into the open. The moon was no longer visible : myriads of stars twinkled in the immense serenity of the heavens.

Sylvester raised the trigger of his gun, and crept forward like an assassin on the alert. Then he stopped for a while, to ascertain the exact spot in the cypress from which came the melodious challenge, the exact spot, amongst the thick foliage, at which he should aim. He was still some way off, and so went on again, always holding his blunderbuss down by his side—when suddenly—how did it happen ?—perhaps he had oiled the rusty weapon too well, and a touch of his leg, jerking the ancient fire-arm, had made the trigger fall, and “bang !” the air resounded with the shot. The unexpected, untimely discharge almost made him drop the gun ; but his surprise turned suddenly to a sense of horror that froze his blood, his hair stood on end ; his heart was in his mouth—At the same time as he became aware of the bird’s silence, Sylvester had heard a pitiful voice, a plea for help, a human cry, “Oooh !” A moan.

Was it ?—Could it be the lament of some spirit he had offended ? the protest, coming from one of those tombs, against his violation of the death-like silence of that sacred abode ? Beyond the gate he could see the black crosses—And, turning, he fled towards the presbytery.

The voice of his daughter comforted him.

"What's happened? Oh dear! Is it you? No—it's someone else who's moaning—"

But at the foot of the stairs Don Cæsar renewed his terror, saying:

"You have wounded a man!"

A man was calling for help; his voice of anguish was already weaker; he was dying . . .

"Come with me!" ordered the priest.

They made their way towards that moaning, with all the speed possible to them, the one suffering from asthma, the other terrified. Where was he? Where could he be?

Following the ditch, between the road and the cemetery wall, they came upon—a soldier, fallen into the ditch and half-hidden by the grasses, just by the cypress.

They lifted him.—He was moaning very, very faintly. There! Lifting him by his arms and legs they carried him, with difficulty, into the presbytery. Up and up! While Ermelinda lighted the way with a candle and moaned: "Oh, dear!"—they managed to lay him on the priest's bed. There he closed his eyes . . . He wore red trousers; he was French!

"It was an accident," affirmed Sylvester, trembling. "I couldn't help it."

But the priest felt the unfortunate man's pulse becoming weaker and weaker, and decided to try a stimulant.

"Bring some white wine! Quick!"

Sylvester's wine seemed to resuscitate a dead man—it gave him the force to murmur some incomprehensible word, which Sylvester interpreted as an explicit accusation of murder, and which Ermelinda took to be a piteous request.

"He wants a doctor," she whispered.

Don Cæsar spoke, with severity:—

"Silence, Ermelinda! Go back to bed! And woe if anyone find out we have a wounded man in the house. . . ."

The girl went, in silence, her face, needless to say, bathed in tears. Sylvester sank into a chair.

Only then did he realise the full danger of it all. The

victorious French would shoot without mercy anyone who had wounded one of their men ; even if he had been mistaken for a nightingale !

“What am I to do ?” he murmured, “What a misfortune ! what a punishment !”

Don Cæsar did not heed him. He had found the wound, which was in the right leg, below the knee. It still bled, but only a little ; and he bound it with a rag, stopping the bleeding, and confident that God would have mercy on the poor fellow.

And, indeed, after a second glass of wine, the young man looked round with interest, and, smiling at the words of comfort which the priest addressed to him, said clearly :

“J’ai faim !”

IV

“Quelle faim !” repeated the Zouave, after the first egg Don Cæsar gave him to drink. At intervals the poor wretch would sleep but then, as if he too had been awakened by a terrifying dream, a dream of ravenous hunger, he would shake himself, open wide his eyes, and yawn :

“Quelle faim !”

“That’s a good sign !” said the priest, ever watchful by his bed-side.

Meanwhile, not yet recovered from his despair, Sylvester sat contemplating his misfortune, and the way to avoid being shot. Would it not have been better if he had really killed the man ? or that he should die before dawn ? They could bury him ; and no one would know anything about it. But he drew back, terrified and repentant, from such a thought. Ah no ! better, after all, that the poor man should recover. Money will settle everything ; money would persuade the man to swear, before a council of war, that he had been wounded by mistake. And then anything might happen, and God’s mercy is so great that perhaps, having wounded the man involuntarily, he would find some solution, without spending a

penny, and without councils of war. At any rate, Don Cæsar was right ; they must keep the unfortunate event a secret. And before the bell-ringer came to ring the Ave Maria in the morning, Sylvester cleared away all trace of blood between the cemetery and the presbytery ; and when the bell-ringer arrived asked him boldly if he had heard a gun-shot during the night.

"It must have been some sentinel, or some soldier reconnoitring," replied the other, with no sign of wonder.

Ah ! that was why the man had been near the cemetery, and had received the shot meant for the nightingale : he was a sentinel, or a soldier just passing by, while reconnoitring. Well . . . well : and if ever it came to be rumoured that he, who had wounded him, had wanted to get rid of a sentinel, for love of the Austrians ? Heaven have mercy on us ! Poor Sylvester, what a situation !

Fortunately neither the loquacious peasant nor anyone else suspected anything.

And, after Mass, Don Cæsar looked to the wounded man, getting his niece to prepare bandages. He also allowed Ermelinda to cook a fine breast of chicken, which the patient ate with evident relish. Eggs, thick broth and chicken at length produced the effect of letting the Zouave sleep without being continually awakened by hunger. In the evening, when he awoke, he smiled and said :

"Bonjour !" and added, in tones of contentment, "On est bien ici ! Je ne veux pas aller à l'ambulance !"

"Bravo !" exclaimed the priest." You shall stay here with us, my dear son."

But the priest could understand no more of his guest's long speech. He spoke too quickly, and with such a pronunciation as would have tried even a French master and Don Cæsar knew little of the allies' tongue. And besides, he did not really need to know it very well. In case of need, gestures would help them, and the soldier soon began to show his skill therein. For instance, he showed so manifestly his admiration for Sylvester's white wine, that the priest was always ready to

hand him a small glassful ; and then his guest would exclaim outright :

“Oh, le bon vin !”

“Bravo, my son !”

Truly practice works wonders. By the next day they had already begun to understand each other better. The Zouave would do his best to put his native “patois” into good French, and the priest, comparing it with Italian, with the Lombard or Piedmontese dialects, even with Latin, would thus by analogy, succeed in understanding the drift of it ; and so they continued, wondering at their own prowess. “Ah ! J’ai compris ! J’ai compris !” would burst from one and the other in turn, and they would laugh together to make the work less toilsome, moved by the mutual friendship that sprang from this common labour. Thus, little by little, during the days that followed, Don Cæsar had the consolation of getting to the bottom of the story of that tragic night. His brother was innocent !

For Marcellin Buron (for that was the name of the Zouave) had been wounded at Devil’s Bridge, and there left for dead when his regiment, having secured the Bridge, had been ordered to retreat to Bagnolo for the night. The poor fellow had swooned through loss of blood and exhaustion, and, having recovered consciousness before his men could come to carry him away, he had endeavoured to find his way to the camp, but instead had gone part of the way in the very opposite direction. He was still bleeding ; he felt he was going to swoon again, and he had lain down at the edge of the ditch, near the cemetery ; and had closed his eyes for sleep of death. But the sound of a shot—the shot involuntarily fired by Sylvester—had startled him to consciousness again.

“Pauvre garçon !” Don Cæsar learnt to say, feeling now totally reassured. And at the same time he thought “Poor Sylvester.”

And the other, the young man, would beseech him :

“Je ne veux pas aller à l’ambulance ! Je veux rester ici, avec vous !”

"Yes, oui ; till you are better."

And the good man would lay his hand on the other's forehead, and the latter would seize and kiss it.

"Will he get better ?" Ermelinda would ask tearfully.

"The Lord will have mercy on us."

But Don Cæsar feared gangrene, and, being now sure that Sylvester ran no risk, even if everything were known, he sent to Bagnolo for the doctor, the first time his brother was away from home.

The doctor came, decided the wound would heal in a month, and left a testimonial exempting the priest from all responsibility. And being a stout Liberal he praised the patriotic charity of which the priest was giving such a noble example.

This praise, filling Don Cæsar's sincere heart with fervour, confirmed his intention of keeping Marcellin Buron with him until he should be able to walk. That was why he had said nothing as yet to Sylvester ; he would not, and could not dispel his brother's fear of danger and punishment.

For Sylvester had not the virtue of sacrifice, even when faced with the prospect of a council of war ; indeed at times he seemed to long for a good shot that would free him from all his troubles. Now, added to the debts he would never recover, to the loss of the wood, was the devastation at home. The bottles of white wine were visibly becoming fewer and fewer ; the ham, the chickens, the eggs all were disappearing rapidly.

"This Frenchman is a wolf !" he grumbled. "Alas, poor me ! What a loss ! What a calamity !"

Was it then conceivable that, once Sylvester's conscience had been unburdened, he would bear with such ruin any longer ?

But, unable to reveal the truth to his brother, Don Cæsar revealed it to Ermelinda, to ease his conscience. Oh ! how she wept for joy at the thought that her father was innocent ! How her heart leapt when her uncle allowed her to take up the patient's food herself ! She was as happy as a very Sister of Charity in the purest fulfilment of her duties.

But even Sisters of Charity can distinguish the ugly from the beautiful ; and Ermelinda could see that the Zouave was a handsome youth ; with that fair beard that gave strength to his finely-cut features, with those bright blue eyes, and that smile which made her tears flow whenever he said : "Merci, madame."

Thus, from day to day, hospitality acquired the strength of habit, much against Sylvester's will.

And what of the war ? Peace ; tranquillity ; silence until the 24th. But on that day from the east there broke out a dread thundering. It was no longer the crack of rifles alone ; there was the booming of cannons, the shattering noise of grape-shot. The sky became dark.

And Sylvester turned on his brother, with new anguish.

"What will you do with the Frenchman if the Austrians win? How can we find an excuse ? How can we defend ourselves ? Can't you hear the noise ?"

Don Cæsar opened wide his arms in the attitude of one who leaves to God the solution of the problem. And the other went on :

"They'll shoot us all, and that'll be the end of it !"

As for Marcellin Buron, he was torn between the eagerness of a war-horse that smells gunpowder and the human satisfaction of a man who, after much suffering, can stand aside and watch from a place of safety the suffering of others : whenever the thundering grew louder, he would half rise in bed, exclaiming, "Vive la France !"—and then sink back deliciously, with a quiet chuckle.

But as if the excitement, the trepidation, the anxiety caused by the continuous, prolonged cannonading were not enough, towards evening the sky grew black, there came a downpour of rain and hail, and here, there and everywhere, from all the corners of heaven, came thunder-claps and flashes of lightning.

Sylvester murmured :

"It is God's judgment on us ! He is weary ! And He is right ! He is right in sending destruction upon us !"

Nor did he feel any relief when the storm abated, for the

fighting seemed to have ceased, too, and the new danger thus became imminent. What if the Austrians had won?

Fortunately early next day came the great news : victory for the French and the Piedmontese ! Victory at Solferino ! Victory at San Martino !

"Ring a double peal !" Don Cæsar ordered the bell-ringer.

"Are you mad ?" asked Sylvester. "Austria is Austria ! Do you imagine the war's ended ?"

Calmly the priest added :

"Te Deum ! ; we must have a triduum in thanksgiving."

And he kept his word. And to the afternoon service came a great crowd of villagers from the neighbourhood. Many wept as they listened to the story of Judas Machabeus ; and all realised that Aod and Barac, who had defeated the Moabites and Canaanites, were Napoleon and Victor Emmanuel. And as they left the church they sought some noisy outlet to the exuberance of their spirits. They found it as they saw hanging from one of the presbytery windows a glorious ensign . . . the red breeches which the Zouave, tired of staying in bed and animated by the victory and the public rejoicing, had himself washed and hung out to dry.

And as if this were an emblem of victory the crowd began cheering lustily ! The rumour had been spread (by whom ?) that there was a French soldier in the presbytery, and someone began shouting "Three cheers for Don Cæsar !" and "where's the Frenchman ?"

Marcellin did not wait to be asked again, but, getting out of bed, he limped across to the window, and was greeted with cheers. But the loyal soldier did not forget that the victory of Solferino was no merit of his, and, in order to persuade the people that at most he had played but a secondary part therein, he seized the breeches and waved them aloft, shouting :

"Vive l'Empereur !"

Who could stop to think that he was dressed only in his shirt ? Or if anyone did, who would have been scandalised ? No—all of them, young men and old, women and all—replied in chorus :

“Long live Napoleon ! Long live Emmanuel ! Long live the priest of Porzano !”

Porzano was radiant with a glory almost equal to that of Solferino and San Martino.

V

Now indeed the priest seemed to have grown young again, to have lost his asthma ; Ermelinda’s cheeks were flushed ; the bell-ringer was hastening about his duties in church, in order to have time to gossip of the great victory ; the peasant insisted on recounting to Sylvester (who only shrugged his shoulders, and tried to escape) what gentlemen these Frenchmen were, much more than the Austrians ! And the soldier was singing at the top of his voice. Marcellin Buron knew quite a fair number of songs and hymns. “Rataplan ! rataplan plan plan !” and he would go limping about the house ; or else sing gaily from the window :

“Ma voisine avait une fillette ;
Jolie, blonde et grassouillette ;
Grassouillette et sans souci :
piripipi !”

That “piripipi,” so shrill, so nimble and so joyful, intoxicated Ermelinda. She would softly accompany the singer, but raise her voice too at the refrain “piripipi.”

But gradually the poor girl came to understand all the words of her favourite song, and to suspect that they expressed fully all the Zouave’s tastes and the French tastes.—In France they liked fair girls and she was dark ; plump girls and she was thin ; small and she was very tall. And yet at times the young man’s eyes seemed to indicate he could adapt his tastes. . . .

It was during the hours of conversation that they exchanged frequent looks. Sylvester was out the greater part of the day, in order not to undergo the torture of seeing the devastation caused in the domestic expenditure, and to avoid seeing and hearing the intruder, of whom he was still frightened ; and Don Cæsar, left in peace, liked to listen to this

bearded overgrown boy, and to interpret his peasant and his war tales.

"Can you understand?" the uncle would sometimes ask the niece.

Oh! There was something else that she well understood! When Marcellin had learnt his hosts' customs, and knew for certain at what hours the priest would be reading his office, and Sylvester would be out, and the girl alone in the kitchen, he went further than mere looks. Then he would quietly go down into the kitchen, opening his mouth as if beseeching a cordial—

"Un baiser . . . mademoiselle! . . . he would beg.

She would run from him; threaten him:

"Sh! here's uncle!" . . . and put in front of him on the table a bottle and a glass.

And in this he drowned his kisses. And they would laugh together, without knowing why. Poor girl! Poor twenty-eight year old dove! Thus for two weeks she resisted, avoiding the slightest stain on her virtue, and, despite the fact that she was head over heels in love, she would have defeated any assault with vigilant modesty, had her father never brought home the news of the armistice.

The armistice meant that for a long while there would be no more fighting; it meant setting at liberty, saying a friendly farewell to the Zouave.

"He won't have to do any marching now," declared Sylvester. "He'll be able to get better completely, and rest quietly with his regiment."

It was with difficulty that Don Cæsar obtained another few days' delay; in order to escape annoyance—he pleaded—and not to disgust the soldier, who was still convalescent. But the armistice, which would in any case hasten Marcellin's departure, and her father's anger, now soon to triumph, weakened the spirit of resistance in Ermelinda. Not that she committed any grave sin—oh no! This was all that happened: three or four days later Marcellin came upon her while she was carrying a small pile of dishes from the table to the side-

board. If she let the dishes fall, in order to defend her pudicity, would it not be precipitating the catastrophe, the vengeance sought by her father, and Marcellin's departure ? And so to save the dishes she had to submit to a shower of kisses : on her hair, on her cheeks, on her eyes, her ears.

And then—then Ermelinda let herself sink into a chair, and burst into wild sobs.

The Zouave stood regarding her for some time in amazement. He seemed to be thinking, "What does this flood of tears mean ? No girl in France would cry like that ; not even if I'd upset her plates."

Fortunately he remembered the white wine, the fresh eggs, and other things he had had, and he realised it was his duty to obtain pardon.

"Pourquoi pleurez-vous ? Je vous aime ! Je vous aimerai jusqu' à la mort ! Quand la guerre sera finie je vous épouserai tout de suite . . . Je suis propriétaire . . . Allons ! Sh ! . . . here ees your uncle !"

Don Cæsar was approaching, and the Zouave made off without the least trace of a limp.

Ermelinda could not calm herself even in the presence of her uncle, and the tears continued to flow down over her face, her breast, and her apron.

"What is it ?"—Don Cæsar was asking, without the least suspicion of the truth.

At length the girl revealed the secret of her tormented heart :

"Marcellin is going to marry me ! He said it ! He told me ! But father will never let me !"

Then matters had already gone thus far ? He had already promised !

Well, well ; recovered from his surprise, the priest showed no dismay, no anger ; he almost felt comforted, though he had not expected it would be his lot to uphold the dignity of the priesthood, and of the family. And straightway he went in search of Marcellin, and told him gravely that he trusted a soldier of honour, a Frenchman of honour, and that he hoped he would never have to repent of such a trust.

‘Oui’—said the Zouave, putting his hand to his breast as if in solemn oath.

“The first duty of a man of honour, a soldier of honour, a Frenchman of honour, is that of respecting hospitality.”

“Oui,” repeated Marcellin.

“If you have honourable intentions,” continued Don Cæsar, “you will speak to the girl’s father to-day.”

“Oui.”

But remembering that Sylvester had never understood a word of what his guest said, the priest added :—

“No. I will speak to him first.”

Marcellin seized his hand and kissed it, and overcome with emotion, murmured :—

“*Merci, mon oncle.*”

And in fact, no sooner had Sylvester returned from the village, than his brother, serenely and calmly and without preamble, informed him of the Zouave’s serious intentions.

“Great Heaven !”—Sylvester fell heavily into a chair, amazed and stunned as if someone had given him a blow on the head.

But Don Cæsar, regarding him with those eyes, which ever seemed to be looking into the future, reflecting on some good deed to be carried out, some near work of charity, had never the shadow of a suspicion of the effect the news might have on him. It seemed such a matter of course to him ! So easy, so natural, so just ; as God would have it. The French and the Italians were sister nations ; no wonder then that they should intermarry. Moreover, Marcellin Buron was a well-meaning young man, and well-to-do. . . .

“And you trust him ? You believe him ? Heavens above ! You—my daughter—my brother—can be so mad as to trust him !”

But meanwhile light began to shine on Sylvester’s confused brain. If he wants to marry my daughter, then he won’t think of accusing me of having wounded him. Ah, you dog ! you’re trapped ! I’ve got you now ! Now I’ll show you !—At length he had discovered how to get rid of him for ever ; per-

haps even how to take vengeance for every loss. . . . The hound ! to make my daughter fall in love with him !

His cunning kept him silent ; he seemed to be thinking it over ; then he sighed and said submissively :—

“God’s will be done ! I’m tired of it all ; I leave it all to Him !”

And in order to further the treachery he had in mind, he called his daughter, and spoke to her kindly—the traitor !

“You trust this Frenchman ?”

“Why not ? Why shouldn’t I ?”—asked the poor twenty-eight year old innocent.

“How can he possibly want to be the son-in-law of a man who nearly killed him ?”

“But it’s not true !” exclaimed Ermelinda, falling into the trap, without thinking—“It wasn’t you. It was the Austrians who had wounded him at Devil’s Bridge !” And she smiled faintly through her tears.

“What ! Are you sure ? Is it true ? And why didn’t you tell me ? Why keep me in agony so long ? But if it is true—if it is true.—Be patient for a while, and perhaps, when the war’s over——”

The girl threw her arms round her father’s neck, weeping in her joy ; Sylvester was unmoved, and with the excuse of some business to be done in Leno, lost no time ; he harnessed the horse and drove off in the direction of Montichiari.

“Now, you thief, I’ve got you !”

VI

He thought that, there, near Solferino, he would find the ambulance, and that he would be able to let one of the officers know there was a wounded soldier at Porzano, to be sent for immediately.

“And he may thank his lucky stars if I don’t give him up as a deserter !”—was his answer to his conscience, reproaching him for his treachery.

The whole of Montichiari had been turned into a hospital.

But when Sylvester arrived it seemed more like some place of amusement, so great was the joy manifest in the shouts, the cheerful greetings, the songs, the embracings of the soldiers of every description who thronged the street. Even the medical officers, and the orderlies, who were going into or coming out of the houses, seemed to share in the common joy, and to have forgotten all the suffering they had seen.

"It must be because of the armistice"—thought Sylvester. "To-morrow the knaves will go back to their butchery and their shooting ; and meanwhile they're rejoicing because they're still alive."

He got down from his gig and holding the bridle in his left hand, walked on till he met an officer, and, touching his hat (not without an inward tremor), said,

"Monsur ! One moment . . ."

The other, who was a doctor, and had learnt how to be patient, listened to his story, trying to understand as much as possible ; he gathered that a certain soldier . . . etcetera, etcetera . . . wanted to be brought to the hospital at once, in order to get better completely. . . . But hearing that this soldier belonged to the 2nd regiment of Zouaves, the officer courteously advised Sylvester to go to the ambulance corps at Carpenedolo—Yes, the 2nd regiment was at Carpenedolo.

Sylvester resigned himself with patience to driving another mile or so ; and amused himself with a soliloquy on paternal love, domestic economy, on his brother's simplicity, and that brigand's cupidity, on France, Italy, Napoleon, Emmanuel, Garibaldi, on God who gives too free a rein to assassins and thieves, and on the devil who will not leave honest men alone.

At Carpenedolo too the soldiers seemed to be very gay ; but here the peasants were standing about in groups, and discussing matters, grave and yet puzzled. Sylvester was about to question someone when an officer like the one at Montichiari, passed close to him.

"Hey ! Monsur ! One moment——"

The officer he spoke to this time understood Italian better

than the other, and listened with equal, or even greater, courtesy.

Très bien ! Bravo, the reverend father of Porzano ! And since the reverend father had been so good, would he keep the wounded man with him, until the latter could come himself?"

"But the soldier was afraid of being punished as a deserter——"

"Eh ! There's no need to be afraid ! The priest can be a witness in his defence."

And as if he, Sylvester, were the priest, he was shaken warmly by the hand, and—"Bonjour, monsieur !"

Here then were the advantages of freedom ! No means for getting rid of a man who carries off all your goods, and turns the heads of your daughters ! "Bonjour !" "But the French'll not get my daughter," growled Sylvester, angrier than ever, now that he had come all that way for nothing. And he was determined to drive out the Zouave Buron, at once, as soon as he got home. "Out with you ! I'm in command here, at last !" Let the reverend father preach ! Let Ermelinda weep ! Better to have it out now that matters had not gone too far, than to have greater misfortune later.

These angry and yet wise resolutions would have produced immediate effect, had not an unexpected delay brought an interruption.

On the return journey the road was blocked by French troops moving westwards.

To get out of their way Sylvester had to make a longer detour ; he turned off towards Leno.

But here too he was stopped by the uproar of troops shouting and singing, beating drums and giving way to unrestrained gaiety, so as to be almost exasperating ; and here too was that same coldness on the part of the peasants. Something strange, unexpected must have happened. Sylvester at last heard of it through a friend, whom he met as he was leaving Leno. It was the undertaker who owed him four hundred crowns for wood.

"Don't you know the news ? Villafranca ? The peace-treaty !"

"Peace !"—exclaimed Sylvester, in amazement.

"Fine comfort for us !" added the other. "Now it'll be either have the French for masters, or pay Napoleon the price of our freedom !"

Sylvester felt he was triumphant. He broke into bitter laughter :

"Didn't I always say so ? Out of the frying-pan into the fire ! I always, always said it !"

"Napoleon's betrayed us ! We're ruined !"

"Ruin ! treachery !"—repeated Sylvester, whipping up the horse furiously—"Now for it !"

Now for the traitors ! At least he would have the satisfaction of kicking one of them out. Out of here, foreigner ! Back to your own country, you dog, and feed on other people there ! To hell with you, to drink white wine, and turn girls' heads ! Oh, I'll flay you alive !

And all the time he wielded his whip furiously. But, alas ! not a mile from home he was again delayed. Waggons loaded with luggage were moving slowly along the same road ; and there was no way of getting past them. Further on there could be heard the usual singing, the usual rolling of drums. Sylvester had to follow at snail's pace. Suddenly the waggons stopped, and he stood up in his gig to see what it was ; he saw a crowd of Zouaves, standing still.

Zouaves ?

"What regiment ?" he asked the men guarding the waggons, his curiosity mysteriously awakened.

What ! The second ! that infamous Buron's regiment !

The delay lasted some time. When they moved on again there rose a shout of laughter from the troops.

How heartily they laughed ! Their hilarity spread from the head of the regiment to those in the rear. And something else was passed down, at sight of which Sylvester felt his heart sink, as if it foretold disaster. A bottle was handed from man to man and reached the hindmost soldier, who drained the last dregs ; then, with a leer he showed it to Sylvester.

"Puis-je vous en offrir ?" and whirled it into the field nearby.

Sylvester instinctively put his hand to his pocket, and breathed freely on feeling the key of the cellar. But how many bottles he had to see being tossed to either side of the road, the glass flashing rapidly in the light of the setting sun.

But now, at length, he had reached home. The presbytery door was wide open. The bell-ringer, wiping from the step a pool of—blood?—no, of red wine, came forward with an inane, empty laugh ; and began telling the story :

“Oh ! what madmen ! What a noise ! What a din ! If you had only been here ! . . .

Marcellin had recognised his soldier-friends from the window, and had invited them in, to do honour to the priest ; and in order to do him befitting honour, they had broken in the cellar-door, and——

“What !” Sylvester rushed upstairs, cursing and shouting. “Where is that dog ? that thief, that traitor ? Where is he ? I’m going to kill him !”

Only the priest was there, overcome by one of his paroxysms of asthma, and Ermelinda, in tears.

Marcellin Buron had not been able to part from his companions, who were going back to France, and who had put him into one of the waggons.

And from there, as he was borne away, he sent farewells, thanks and kisses to that sweet haven of joy and love.

“Adieu, mademoiselle ! Adieu, mon oncle ! À jamais !”

Calm reigned once more ; heaven and earth once more regained their serenity. And the nightingale in the churchyard began again to sing from that ancient cypress. And Sylvester Carretti no longer felt the desire to kill it.

But to that

“Jug, jug, jug”

there came the answer, in a heart left desolate, the echo of another song—

“piripipi !”

(II)

THE FIRE-BRIGADE

(Translated by —)

THE fire-brigade of Rivabassa needed only two things in order to prove themselves a perfectly disciplined and well-trained body of men ready for all emergencies : and these were a pump and a fire. Not that they possessed extinguishers or motor fire engine or folding ladders : no, at that time class rivalry had not yet taught people to claim their equal share of good and evil, and a village like Rivabassa could not allow itself the luxury of having either fires or instruments as good as those of the town. All the same, even Rivabassa possessed hatchets, ropes of various thicknesses, a hook ladder, another shorter ladder, helmets and official rosettes, a trumpet and, more than these, willingness, a military discipline, unbounded courage, and an ambition that was heroic. The firemen were, in private life, carpenters, blacksmiths, bricklayers, cobblers : sturdy generous-hearted drinkers, especially on the afternoons of Sundays and other holidays.

And Gigi Gamba was in command. He was a sight not to be missed, this first class book-keeper, bursting with ideas and a desire for progress, when he was practising his men in their manœuvres and directing their attack on an imaginary fire ! Short, thin, yellowish, he would take up the pose of a Napoleon—a medieval Napoleon who would enjoy scaling a fortress-wall, or rather a modern one content with a job in the fire-brigade.—“Up with you ! Let down the ropes ! Bring down the wounded—careful ! Hack off that beam ! Point the hose over there ! Turn on the hydrant !”

The only thing was that they had neither hose nor hydrant. Finally, Gamba heard one day that the National Petroleum Company wished to sell a pump in good condition previous to

buying another more powerful one : he made haste to go and inspect it, right up among the mountains. He saw it draw petroleum from a well and realised at once that, place it on a cart with a hose attached, and it would, under his guidance, work to perfection. With the permission of the municipal authorities he acquired it at a most moderate price. He even obtained, in addition to the suction pipe, twenty yards of ordinary hose. A bargain !

Now there was merely the fire to wait for.

It came only too soon, when the pump, having been adapted to its new function, had been tried out but once by the mechanic and then without water.

This worried no one, all the more because it happened to be on a Sunday, after Vespers. The firemen were occupied in drinking and gambling in the various hostelrys, when suddenly—Boum boum boum ! the bell tolling ! fire !—and leaping to their feet they rushed out.

“Teobaldo’s is on fire,” cried the street urchins. And off they went at a run to the other end of the village, where Teobaldo, a dealer in coal and firewood, had his store, the Casaccia. The street was already blocked with women and others returning home after the Benediction : all were talking at the tops of their voices.

“Teobaldo ! The Casaccia ! Gracious goodness ! What a fire ! The damage ! What a disaster !”

And they had urged each other on to go and take a look over there.

“Make room, stand aside ! Here come the firemen with their pump !”

The firemen, indeed, arrived with a great deal of trumpet-blowing, their leader directing them : most of them were running. Behind the others came Buzzula, tall and thin, silent and unexcited as usual, though he had had more than a bottle, and Sandro, the blacksmith, who was dawdling along in no great hurry.

Meanwhile, heavy dark smoke was pushing its way out through the window of the store and rising in sluggish waves

that gradually thinned to yellowish and ashy hues. But Teobaldo himself was not present. He had gone to a distant fair. Poor Teobaldo !

"Connect the hydrant with that well," ordered Gigi Gamba pointing to the house opposite.

But there, owing to the July drought, there was no water.

"Try Cardi's," someone suggested.

"Cardi's then," the commandant repeated, annoyed at being offered advice. But it was true that Signor Cardi's well, a little further on, was fed by abundant and unfailing springs of pure water, so that one may say the whole countryside used it.

They dragged the pump there, put one of the pipes in the water and turned the other towards the fire. Alas ! a hose of twenty yards could not cover a distance of over thirty.

"It doesn't matter ! The jet will get there !" exclaimed the commandant, more annoyed than ever. "Aim at the windows," he ordered. "Raise the pipe ! Pump ! Pump !"

Right ! And, on the crowd of spectators descended a fierce and unexpected and well-distributed soaking, sopping, streaming shower.

Cries and oaths and curses and protests proved that the pump was in splendid working order.

"It doesn't reach," Sandro the blacksmith pointed out (he held the position of sergeant).

"It doesn't matter," yelled Gigi Gamba, angrier than ever. So they continued to water the roadway.

Poor Teobaldo !

But the Napoleon of firemen, with folded arms, was thinking. Where was the greatest danger ? To the left of the Casaccia, from which the smoke was escaping, was the new house of the retired officer of the town planning survey ; to the right the groom's shed, a hayloft with a small low room underneath. The entrance consisted of two wooden pilasters supporting a cross-beam ; there was the greatest danger. And, as a matter of fact, the groom, who had nothing to fear for himself or his family, his house and stable being in a hamlet some way off, was calling out :

"Save me." And his wife was urging that the big jar which she kept under the porch should be protected from the flames, as if it was a question of her mother's and sisters' safety.

"Get the ladder ready."

As the pump was useless, the commandant had decided on a new course of action. He ordered five or six men up the longer ladder, among whom was Buzzula, the carpenter, drunk but calm, to cut down the roof of the loft ; and he sent four or five others up the short ladder to throw the hay down into the street.

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Signor Livetti, the retired official from the town planning survey, was returning from his usual walk to the Capucin monastery, when he thought he saw, when he did in fact see a column of smoke away at the other end of the village. "It must be the furnace," he thought. But the smoke increased and spread : it was a house on fire. The old man felt a tightening at his heart and asked himself anxiously : "Can it be my house ?"

Now that he led a contented life—he had his pension, was a widower and the owner of a pretty villa aptly called the Palazzina—he suffered from a terror of fire : this, his only anxiety, embittered the calm of his last years.

Of what use was the insurance ? Even if it had been no trouble to replace the house, the loss of his possessions would have caused him irreparable damage. Everything in the Palazzina had been gradually acquired at the cost of many a sacrifice, and was as dear to him as the creatures of his own flesh and blood. Everything, from the furniture and trinkets in the drawing-room to the 'cello he played for recreation, from the sideboard ornamented with mirrors in the dining-room, to his books in the study (including an illustrated edition of *The Three Musketeers*).

All his blood rushed to his head, then he turned very pale and began to run as fast as he could, for a treacherous voice within him answered, "Yes, yes, it is certainly *your* house."

One man, seeing him running, cried out, "It's in your direction all right." Another encouraged him, "Don't alarm yourself, Signor Livetti ! The firemen are there with their engine !" Another : "It is the Casaccia, not your house, that is burning !"

Gracious ! The Casaccia was next door to himself . . . ! He continued to sprint like a youngster. When he had passed the crowd and the pile of hay in the middle of the road, through the smoke, he caught sight of the firemen on the roof of the hayloft, dealing vigorous blows up there as if they were cutting the air in pieces, while the commandant below was watching them at their work.

"Lieutenant," asked Livetti, turning to Gamba, with what breath was left to him, "Is there any danger ? Am I in danger ?" Gigi did not reply. He was watching and thinking. The poor man was afraid he had made a mistake in his mode of address, and corrected himself.

"Captain, am I in danger ?"

No reply. The commandant was thinking : "Why waste time and labour attacking the roof and emptying the loft ?" This roof rested on the hayloft, and the loft on the room below. But remove the two poles or pilasters of the doorway and would not the whole construction fall to the ground ? The fire on that side would have nothing to get hold of.

"Sergeant."

Sandro came up and listened with approval to his orders. Resting the shorter ladder against the pilasters he went up it and began unnauling them from the cross-beam.

"The ropes here !"

Two thick ropes were attached to the tops of the pilasters. The trumpet was blown and the new orders sung out : "Down below everyone ! to the ropes !"

Only Buzzula the carpenter seemed not to have heard and continued cutting at the air. It was so pleasant up there ! The particular fire that was within him added the illusion of an agreeable equilibrium, a wondrous tranquillity. *He* was not the one to be afraid. Not a cry, not a shudder. . . . But

he was obedient. On the repetition of the order—"Come along ! down with you"—he announced "Coming," and started off along the roof at a good pace, with his axe over his shoulder.

The only thing was that he set off by a route directly contrary to that which he had taken on the way up : boldly and confidently he proceeded, convinced that he was walking along an uninterrupted and level road . . . until the ground fell away from under his feet. He had not even realised that he needed wings, he had not yet said to himself in his calm way, "Let us fly then," when, axe on shoulder, down he fell, down from the roof on to the fig-tree in the yard, which received him unshakably in its open arms.

Meanwhile his companions, not seeing him, imagined that he had got down by the other ladder : and since the commandant desired them to pull at the ropes, they did their duty and pulled.

Each post gave a crack : then—pull !—they gave way, separated themselves from the cross-beam and the whole shed collapsed with a terrifying crash in a heap of debris.

Well done ! The big jar was smashed to pieces under the falling beams and bricks and tiles, while the hay that had not been removed was buried in a mixture of stones and dust. But the operation had been successful. Neither hayloft nor porch could now catch fire, because they were no longer in existence.

Then Gigi Gamba, with his usual self-possession and his usual thought for the future, called out—

"Signor Livetti !"

"Is there danger ?"

"Don't you see all the smoke ?"

The smoke had decreased, but no one was aware of the fact : and if the fire had nothing further to do on one side, it was reasonable to suppose that it might turn its attention to the other. With equal discipline and an undiminished spirit of self-sacrifice the firemen directed their efforts, according to orders, to the left-hand side of the Casaccia. Some climbed

on to the roof of the Palazzina and recommenced their wielding of axes : others went indoors with the old man in order to save his belongings. Open the windows, out with everything that comes to hand ! and they tossed and threw and hurled out into the street every single thing they could find.

They began with the drawing-room : out with stools and chairs and ornaments (in the street, on the pavement, on the stones !). Next the bedroom : mattresses, washstand, everything ! Then the study : the 'cello (in the street, on the stones !) the books (*The Three Musketeers*). The dining-room next. . . .

In vain did Signor Livetti beseech them with clasped hands, running about everywhere like a youngster, "Enough, enough ! For God's sake, don't save anything else ! But what are you doing ? Help ! Are you mad ?"

The others replied with conviction : "We are doing our duty."

The fulfilment of one's duty is so difficult that it often seems the work of a madman.

In the dining-room, after the chairs had gone, they seized upon the sideboard, ornamented with mirrors. . . .

* * *

Luckily the sergeant of police now returned with a companion from a tour of inspection. Seeing the confusion, he was seized with the remarkable idea of leaning in through the window of the store. He looked round and through the thinning smoke could see nothing but a small heap of glowing embers. That was all. No blaze, no flames : just the dying embers.

"It is over," shouted the sergeant.

Even the chief of the fire brigade had to admit that deprived of fuel the fire had, one might say, been got under.

Better so. It was time to rest.

The trumpet sounded a general rally : and all the firemen with the exception of Buzzula, retired in file with their pump to the station. They were weary but content.

Now it was, however, that the victims of the disaster vented their woes on the sergeant and his companion. The retired official shed big round tears and in the bitterness of his heart poured forth streams of abuse which he had not employed for twenty years, and used to apply only to the head of his department and the ministers : "Rogues ! Brigands ! Assassins !" he moaned.

The groom promised to murder all and sundry, asking who would make him a new hut ? Who would compensate him for his ruined hay ?

As if this did not suffice, his wife demanded her jar : otherwise, she swore she would tear the heart out of whoever had broken it. She forgot that the firemen were nine or ten in number, and that she would have to tear out a dozen hearts : a somewhat difficult enterprise.

As if even this did not suffice, the groom's son, who already showed a budding talent for rodomontade, threatened to knife Buzzula because in his fall he had squashed all the ripe figs and knocked the others off the tree.

"All this is nothing," said a tall grave-looking gentleman with a white beard, who had just come up. "Sergeant, there is something far more important."

The sergeant recognised Signor Cardi, the owner of the well fed by abundant and unfailing springs of pure water : behind him stood three women, chattering like geese, each carrying a pail of water.

"Would you like a drink, sergeant ?"

"Drink," said the sergeant to his companion, who took off his cap and approached his lips to the pail. Puh ! What a stink of petroleum ! Filthy !

The sergeant himself thought it was his duty to smell and exclaimed severely :—

"The well must be emptied."

"And who will pay for that ?" yelled Signor Cardi in a sudden passion.

"And who's going to pay for these ?" A Fury, who had just come up, was brandishing something long and dark. Instead

of being thankful that her husband had not broken his collar-bone in his terrific fall or cut himself to pieces with his axe, but was in bed safe and sound and calm as ever, sleeping off his drunkenness, Buzzula's wife—for it was she—clamorously waved his trousers, torn to tatters by the branches of the fig-tree. For several years her husband had worn them every Sunday, but she shrieked out : "A new pair of trousers ! Oh, look at the state they're in now ! They were absolutely new : and who's going to pay for them ?"

But to increase the confusion, last of all appears the dealer Teobaldo. Returning from the fair, he had heard on the road that his Casaccia was burning : and from the depths of his heart he had rejoiced. When he reached the village, he saw only too clearly that the Casaccia was as he had left it at his departure : and now he covered the firemen with the most disgusting and obscene abuse, that would have disgraced a fish market and accused them of having ruined him. The sergeant, hearing him, imagined that he had lost a fortune in the flames and asked :

"What had you got in there ?"

"Nothing," replied Teobaldo, shrugging his shoulders. "A few bundles of sticks and three sacks of coal dust."

"What are you worrying about, then ?"

"Oh, I know what I know."

Certain things are not good to tell. He had insured the Casaccia for 10,000 lire—it may have cost him at most 4,000. For some time he had wanted a good fire. And he sincerely believed that the firemen had saved it !

But for this—no, no—the firemen deserved neither praise nor blame.

(From "Zuechetto Rosso." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(III)

THE UMBRELLA

(Translated by —)

I

THEY happened to go together, one afternoon in June, to the public gardens and were delighted to discover that they were of almost exactly the same age. The one—Ceccuti—was eighty-three, and the other—Boldrighi—was eighty-four. A good old age, and well carried by both of them and they both had a well-preserved look which, in spite of the fact that their faces and persons were utterly different, made them in each other's eyes as like as brothers. But they both felt even more strongly this fraternal feeling when they repeated each other's names.

"I must certainly have known a Boldrighi."

"And I a Ceccuti."

Where then and when? Since Ceccuti had left Bologna before he was thirty and had returned only two years back with a son, a railway pensioner. Boldrighi, on the other hand, had never lost sight of the two towers, thus their encounter, had it ever taken place, must have dated back more than half a century to this same Bologna. Who knows?

They went right back to the time of their boyhood, recalled to mind their masters and schoolmates, sought family relations, delved into the contemporary history of the city, re-figured centrally in the most pompous ceremonies and upon the most famous occasions and found nothing. The ray of revealing light did not come. And yet their memories were fresh of things past.

After lengthy thought, Ceccuti suddenly exclaimed :

"Do you remember a certain girl Rosa, called the . . ."

"The Garibaldina !" cried Boldrighi, blushing in his plump cheeks.

This was no mere light : it was lightning to scatter the darkness.

Ah, just imagine, that was how they'd met.

"The Garibaldina !" Ceccuti repeated with eyes half shut.

"That was it ! We were two of the Thousand."

And they chuckled aloud. But soon they shelved that memory which, had they been able, they would have certainly cancelled out of their . . . biography.

"When one is young . . ." said one apologetically. And the other :

"Well, let us console ourselves with the fact that we are still here to talk over our foolishness."

"Ah yes, my health is good, I am well in mind and body."

"And I ? Who would believe it ? I have never had a bad illness in my life."

"Well I, on the other hand, have had several but they did me good. They purged my blood."

Then : moderation in all things ; renunciation of practically everything : this was, in a word, the creed of Boldrighi to maintain his state of preservation.

Ceccuti shook his head.

Moderation in all things, yes, but renunciation of nearly everything, no, he could not agree to that. Thus, he still drank good wine at lunch and dinner and still he smoked a delicious little pipe after each. And he kept well on his feet. In the daytime he went into town from outside the Porta Saragozza, where he lived, and the evening he went to the public gardens and always returned home on foot.

"Motion is life."

Boldrighi shook his head disapprovingly.

"When the machine is old, one must look after it."

No wine and no tobacco ! He lived on eggs and milk, and to return to his home in Via Mascarella he took the tram to Porta di Santo Stefano and then the Piazza tram. A little walk

and a breath of fresh air were sufficient to keep the machine from rusting.

So they differed in their opinions on hygienic régime but their conviction of having found the way to hang on as long and as well as possible lightened their hearts.

"The world has never seemed so beautiful to me as at this moment," said Ceccuti.

"Always happy, never anxious !" chanted Boldrighi.

II

This autumn friendship gave the two old men a new faith in life. So that from the beginning they had understood that the presence of the one would testify to the eyes of the other his own state of well-being and that the remainder of the voyage would seem even easier and more pleasing to accomplish together. Therefore to see each other every evening became more than a habit, a necessity.

Happily seated in the usual spot in the gardens, they brought up happy memories, excluded or just hinted at the sad ones, marvelled at coincidences, discovered conformity of character, action and ideal. And they did not discuss politics.

We want no bad blood between us—

We want to walk in love and mutual accord—

One is so well with peace and quiet !—

Always happy, never anxious !—

Perhaps the decline of old age brought with it the most intense desire for existence, and yielded, every day, every hour, every minute, the pleasure of that desire which, by miracle or by a singular grace of God or the just predilection of fate, had been granted to them ? A certain appearance of vitality—perhaps the only power left—hid their bodily decay, and then the instinct of conservation rose to a placid egoism. Death is behind their backs, invisible because they are already under its shadow. A satisfaction—just like the satisfaction of a man who finds himself to be the sole survivor of a butchery, or of one who conjures up, from the harsh reality of existence, an

uninterrupted illusion of vague dreams—prevailed in them almost consciously, every day, every hour, every minute.

But woe to them, if contrasts and suspicions crept in to awake and stir the anxiety for an imminent end !

The excellent Ceccuti and Boldrighi had not foreseen that a sort of instinctively rivalry, a half ingenuous and half insane competition would arise between them as to who was to live longer than the other—were it by one year only. This was the lees that lay at the bottom of their amiable friendship.

The occasion which was to reveal that unpleasant feeling, came just from the different views they held about the method for living a long time.

They began to look at each other asking themselves,

“Is he healthier than I ? Would it not be better if I also took to live on milk and eggs ?”—Or : “Shall I, too, drink a glass of wine ? What if I also smoked a pipe just to help my digestion ?”

In the midst of these doubts, they tried to conceal more and more their indispositions and infirmities ; but their effort was only too apparent from their aspect. Then they took confidence and thought, glancing at each other :

“My dear fellow, you are looking rather ill to-day ! If you do not change your system, I shall have to be your mourner and say a requiem for your soul !”

But this kind of consolation did not last long. The doubt, the suspicion, the anxiety, soon returned. They felt themselves impelled to give vent to their mood, as each of them was sure that any attempt to convert the other to his own method would be futile.

They took to contradicting each other, to disputing obstinately and insistently. The discussions soon became quarrels, and not to appear too weak by giving way, whenever one of them was brought to bay by the other’s arguments he began to insult his companion. The other replied in the same tone.

“Yes !”

“No !”

“I say yes !”

"I say no."

"It is impossible to reason with you. You are more obstinate than a mule !"

"And you ? . . . It is useless to waste one's patience on you !"

They went on like this until they said at the same time :

"Now, shut up !"

"Shut up !"

Then Ceccuti would take up his newspaper or the list of his expenses and read them without glasses ; and Boldrighi with his stick would draw the head of an ass on the gravel (without glasses) and put a big C beneath it—quickly wiping out his drawing, however, before his friend perceived it.

When the bell-tower of San Giuliano struck eight o'clock they rose to their feet and went along together, in silence. At the town gate they parted with a cold "good-night." Boldrighi went slowly to the Porta di Santo Stefano to wait for the tram, and Ceccuti walked along the old ramparts of the city towards Porta Saragozza.

The following day they spent painful hours meditating over the discussions, the provocations, the accusations, the insults, the defences. They grumbled :

"This night I am not going with him. And if he has got a bit of self-respect, he will not go to the gardens either. I have called him a mule—I have called him an ass. It is high time to stop all that. Now our friendship is finished for good."

But an inner voice reproached them : "You, too, are in the wrong," and the dissatisfaction grew to disgust and changed to repentance.

When the usual time came round, they were no longer able to resist. They felt that this last bond of theirs was indissoluble ; they gave way as if to a fate. And they went to the gardens.

The first to arrive waited for the other. He felt uncomfortable, looked straight in the well-known direction or shot a glance there from time to time. What a long delay ! His friend was not coming ! Was he really offended ? Was he ill,

dead? They would never have believed that they were so greatly attached to each other.

Ah, there he is at last! And they smiled at each other from afar.

Ceccuti, in a joyful mood, when he arrived at a few paces from the seat, asked in his native dialect:

"Has anything new happened?"

And Boldrighi, when he was the last to arrive:

"Here we are, old friend! It's the tram that was late."

How nice it was not to feel rancour, to be in perfect harmony! But . . . sometimes the most innocent assertion, suddenly stopped and contradicted by one of them, gave origin to a new quarrel.

"You said Malibran was tall! No, not more so than Galletti."—"Cesare Rossi was a better artist in *Othello* than Salvini! What silly nonsense!"—"Ugo Bassi took off his glasses when he addressed the people! But he never wore spectacles!"—"Pietramellara a count? He was not even noble."

And you must not think that these difficulties were quickly overcome. Because Malibran, for example, led to discussions on music. Great actors brought them on to the subject of great actresses, from Risorì to Duse—these also judged by the two old men quite differently; and Ugo Bassi and Pietramellara impelled them towards political discussions, though they had promised to avoid such topics.

Thus Boldrighi once lost his self-control so much that he began to shout:

"Come here someone! This man is turning mad!"

And Ceccuti once dared to shake his fist in the face of his friend, saying:

"If you were not my elder by one year . . ."

III

Finally, at the beginning of September, an umbrella intervened to solve all the quarrels.

It had been a very hot day, just as if it were August. Not a breath of air even towards the evening ; not a small cloud in the shining whiteness of the sky.

Boldrighi came up to his friend, who had preceded him to the gardens, carrying a large black umbrella instead of his horn-handled stick.

"It is snowing !" called out Ceccuti from the seat with a laugh.

The other sat down, panting.

"It will rain before night."

"Who told you that ?"

"My feet."

"Is that so ? Then your knowledge is in your feet ?"

"Even though you think you carry yours in your head, mine is worth more."

"I know the barometer is high."

"And I know the barometer is wrong."

One can easily gather from this exordium what were the proceedings of that evening : a sort of scientific discussion, based on their violently contrasting opinions about the influence of the weather on corns, bowels and nerves, the pressure and density of the air, the croaking of frogs, the stinging of flies, and so on and so forth.

In this sort of knowledge Ceccuti was more advanced than his friend and spoke with more assurance ; but Boldrighi, though interrupting him from time to time, gave himself up to looking at the sky south-westwards. At a certain moment he pointed in that direction.

"Do you see, down there ?" he said.

The mountains appeared misty under a sky that had become leaden-coloured.

"Heat clouds, nothing more," retorted his friend.

"Don't you hear ? It is thundering over there," Boldrighi insisted.

"But why should there not be electricity in the air without vapour ? Secrets of Nature and mysteries of physics, to have thunder in an almost cloudless sky !"

Boldrighi let him speak. He was waiting, and smiling ironically, for he saw big lowering clouds fast advancing, becoming blacker and blacker in the middle and livid at the edges. The thunder echoes noisily warned Ceccuti that it was time to stop lecturing.

He remained silent for awhile. Then, not to confess his discomfiture :

"You have been brought up in no good tradition," he began again angrily. "You carry umbrellas and go by tram. The Romans conquered the world on foot and never dreamed of umbrellas. When it rained and they got wet, they did as I do : they went home to dry themselves, drank a glass of wine and then went to bed in order to get warm. See ?"

"Do you really do that ?"

Now Boldrighi was concealing his thoughts under the irony of this question. He had meant to lend his umbrella to Ceccuti, believing that he would not like to give up his daily constitutional because of the shower. But as he had said that he was not afraid of getting wet, and it seemed he liked to ape the Roman, so much the worse for him. He, Boldrighi, would keep the umbrella for himself. And, as he had it, he need not run away like the others who, from all parts of the gardens, were fleeing to take shelter in the town. Big drops had already begun to raise the dust, and yet neither of the two old men wished to be the first to get up. At last there was a flash of lightning not far away. They rose quickly to their feet.

Near the gates Ceccuti stopped a moment to look at the sky.

"It is not raining any more. Just a few drops. Good-night, then." And he went on his way at a quick and steady pace.

Boldrighi, however, felt some remorse and waited. A few minutes later the shower began in earnest.

"Ceccuti ! Wait, Ceccuti !" he cried, following him, eager to remedy his stiffness. He ran, the little old man, himself wondering at the swiftness of his old legs.

"Stop ! Wait for me, Ceccuti ! My umbrella will serve us both !"

But the other continued without listening.

"He will soon be tired," thought Ceccuti, "he will go back, and I shall take shelter under Porta Castiglione." But presently he also felt a doubt, a sense of remorse. He turned about.

"Are you mad to run like that?" he shouted to Boldrighi. "You'll become overheated, you'll fall ill!"

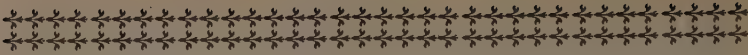
Pity made good old Ceccuti stop to wait for his friend, notwithstanding the shower. But when Boldrighi, who was now out of breath, reached his friend and took him under the umbrella, a gust turned it inside out, and the two old men remained like two poor chickens close against each other under the pouring rain.

Nor was this all. The tram, which the bold walker too had resignedly decided to take, was several minutes late : centuries, to them, not minutes ; and the wind was so cold and strong under Porta Castiglioni. . . . It chilled the perspiration on their bodies, poor old men !

* * *

Nor did the pneumonia—which both of them caught—give either of them the time to say a requiem for the other.

(From "Top." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)



PIRANDELLO

(1867-)



(I)

THE FLY

(Translated by Miss M. LANKESTER)

BREATHLESSLY straining to go faster when they were below the village—Here, up here, come on !—they climbed up the rough chalky bank, using their hands as well—Stick to it, now !—because their nailed boots—Holy God !—were slipping.

They had scarcely arrived on the edge of the bank, purple in the face, when the women who were crowding noisily round the little fountain just outside the village all turned round to look. Now weren't they the Tortorici brothers, those two ? Yes, Neli and Saro Tortorici. Oh, the poor devils ! and why ever were they running like that ? Neli, the younger of the brothers, being quite exhausted, stopped for a moment to take breath and to answer the women : but Saro pulled him away by one arm.

"Giurlannu Zaru, our cousin !" Neli said then, turning round, and he raised his hand as if to give a blessing. The women broke out in exclamations of sympathy and horror : one of them asked loudly :

"Who was it ?"

"Nobody : God !" cried Neli from afar.

They rushed through the small square, to the house of the doctor.

* * *

The doctor, Sидoro Lopiccòlo, in shirt-sleeves, with a beard of at least ten days' growth on his flaccid cheeks, his eyes swollen and bleared, was wandering round the room, drag-

ging his old slippers along the floor and holding in his arms a miserable little invalid, all yellow, and nothing but skin and bones, about nine years old.

His wife had been in bed for eleven months : six children in the house, besides the one he held in his arms who was the eldest, all ragged, dirty and wild ; the whole house upside down, a ruin ; the leavings from meals, fruit peel, filth, all in heaps on the ground ; broken chairs, arm-chairs with no seats to them, beds that had not been made for goodness knows how long, with the blankets in shreds, because the children amused themselves by fighting on the beds with the pillows—the little devils !

There alone remained intact, in the room that had once been the parlour, an enlarged portrait photograph, hung up on the wall, the portrait of himself, of the doctor Sídoro Lopiccolo, when he was still a youth and had just taken his degree : clean, well-dressed, fresh and smiling.

He went and stood before this portrait now, dragging his feet ; he showed his teeth in an ungracious sneer, bowed before it, and presented to it his sick daughter, holding out his arms.

“Here you are, Sisine !”

Because that was what his mother lovingly used to call him in those days ; his mother who expected great things of him because he was the Benjamin, the column and support of the house.

“Sisine !”

He greeted the two peasants like a mad dog.

“What do you want ?”

Saro Tortorici spoke with difficulty, his cap in his hand.

“Doctor, there’s a poor man, our cousin, who is dying——”

“Happy man ! Ring the bells for joy !” cried the doctor.

“No, sir—he’s dying, quite suddenly, nobody knows what of. In the neighbourhood of Montelusa, in a stable.”

The doctor took a step backwards and broke out savagely :

“At Montelusa ?”

It was a good seven miles of road away from the village. And what a road !

"Yes, sir, quickly, quickly, for pity's sake !" besought Tortorici. "He's all black like a piece of liver ! And swollen, it's terrifying ! Please come !"

"But how, on foot ?" shouted the doctor. "Ten miles on foot ? You're mad ! The mule ! I want the mule ! Have you brought it ?"

"I'm going right now to get it," Tortorici hastened to reply, "I will borrow it."

"Then I," said Neli, the younger, "in the meantime, I will hurry off and get a shave."

The doctor turned to look at him as if he wished to eat him up with his eyes.

"It's Sunday, sir," said Neli in excuse, smiling, bewildered. "I'm engaged——"

"Oh, you're engaged, are you ?" snarled the doctor, beside himself. "Take this then !"

Speaking thus he put his sick child into the other's arms ; then one by one he took the other little brats that had gathered round and angrily pushed them against his legs.

"And this one ! And this ! And this ! And this ! Beast ! Beast !"

He turned his back upon him, made to go away, but turned round, took back the little sick girl, and shouted to the two men :

"Go away ! Get the mule ! I am coming immediately."

Neli Tortorici turned away smiling, going down the steps behind his brother. He was twenty years old ; Luzza, his betrothed, was sixteen : a rose ! Seven children ? Too few ! He wanted twelve. And to keep them, he would use only the good pair of arms that God had given him. Always happy. Work and sing, all with the force of skill digging and singing. Not for nothing was he called Liola, the poet. And feeling himself beloved by all for his obliging kindness and unchanging good nature, he smiled even to the air he was breathing. The sun had not yet succeeded in tanning his skin, nor in drying up the rich golden colour of his curly hair that so many women envied him ; so many women who

blushed, disturbed, if he looked at them in a certain way, with those clear bright eyes of his.

He was less worried that day on account of his cousin Zaru than because of the anger his Luzza had shown towards him, Luzza who for seven days had been longing for that Sunday in order to be with him for a bit. But could he, in all conscience, neglect that Christian charity? Poor Giurlannu! He was engaged too! What a sad thing, all of a sudden like this! He was beating the almond trees, down there, on Lopes' estate at Montelusa. The morning before, on Saturday, it had looked like rain; but there seemed no imminent danger of a shower.

Towards midday, however, Lopes says: "God will work within the hour, my children, I don't want my almonds to remain on the ground in the rain." And he had ordered the women who were picking them up to go into the store-house, to shell them. "You," he says to the men who were beating (and they were there too, Neli and Saro Tortorici), "you, if you like, go up too, with the women to do shelling." "All right," says Giurlannu Zaru, "but do I get my whole day's pay of a shilling?" "No," says Lopes, "I shall count your pay for half a day; the rest at half-pay, like the women." It was cheating! Why, was there any reason for the men to cease work and not earn a whole day's pay? It was not raining; nor, in fact, did it rain the whole day, nor that night. "Half-pay like the women?" asks Giurlannu Zaru. "I'm a man. You give me my half day's pay at twenty-five pence a day, and I go."

He did not go away: he stayed there to wait till the evening for his cousins who had been content to do shelling, at half-pay, with the women. At one time, however, weary of standing idle and watching, he went into a stable near by, to lie down and sleep, telling the others to wake him up when the time came to go home.

They had been beating for a day and a half, and only a few almonds had been gathered. The women proposed to shell them all that evening, working late and staying there to sleep

for the rest of the night, in order to go next morning to the village, rising while it was yet dark. This they did. Lopes brought cooked beans and two flasks of wine. At midnight, having finished the shelling, all of them, men and women, lay down to sleep calmly on the threshing-floor, where the straw that was left was wet with dew, as if it had really rained.

"Sing, Liola !"

And he, Neli, had begun to sing, improvising. The moon came in and out through a thick network of little black and white clouds, and the moon was the round face of his Luzza who smiled or became sad with the sad and happy ups-and-downs of love.

Giurlannu Zaru had stayed in the stable. Just before day-break, Saro had gone to wake him up and found him there, swollen and black, with a sweating fever.

This was what Neli Tortorici told there to the barber, who, letting his attention wander at one point, cut him with the razor. A tiny little wound, near the chin, nothing to talk of ! Neli did not have time to think of it again, for at the door of the barber's shop he met Luzza with her mother and Nita Lumia, the poor girl who was betrothed to Giurlannu Zaru, crying and weeping desperately.

It needed a lot of persuasion to make the poor little thing understand that she could not go to Montelusa to see her sweetheart : she would see him before the evening, as soon as they brought him back, as best they could. Saro came along then, shouting that the doctor was already mounted and wished to wait no longer. Neli drew Luzza aside and asked her to have patience ; he would be back before evening, and would have many fine things to tell her.

Fine things, indeed, even this kind, for lovers who tell them, holding hands, and looking into each other's eyes.

* * *

Cursed road ! Precipices that spelled death to Doctor Lopiccolo, notwithstanding the fact that Saro on one side, Neli on the other, guided the mule by its halter.

From where they were, one could see all the vast countryside of the plains and valleys, cultivated with corn, olives and almonds ; yellow now with stubble, and here and there spotted with black from bonfires. At the bottom one could see the sea, of a rough blue colour. Mulberries, carob, cypresses, olives all kept their various perennial greens ; the branches of the almond trees were already becoming thin.

All around, in the vast circle of the horizon, there seemed to be a veil of wind. But the heat was exhausting, the sun was splitting the stones. Now and then, from beyond the dusty cactus hedges, there came the chirping of a cicada or a magpie's laugh which made the doctor's mule prick up its ears.

"Bad mule ! Bad mule !" he would complain.

In order not to lose sight of those ears, he took no notice even of the sun in his eyes, and he left his open umbrella, lined with green, leaning on his shoulder.

"Don't be afraid, sir, we are here," the Tortorici brothers said to encourage him.

Really, the doctor wasn't afraid. But he was thinking of his children. He had to mind his skin on account of those seven miserable brats.

To distract him, the brothers started to tell him about the bad year : wheat was scarce, barley was scarce, beans were scarce ; for the almonds it was different, they were never certain, laden one year, bare the next ; and they did not speak of the olives, the snow had withered them all at the beginning ; nor could they make it up with the grape-harvest, because all the vineyards in the countryside were infested with blight.

"Fine consolation !" the doctor kept on saying, shaking his head.

After two hours' journeying all conversation was exhausted. The road ran straight for a long stretch, and upon its surface, thick with white dust, the four hoofs of the mule and the nailed boots of the peasants began to converse together. Liola, for a time started to sing in disgust, half to himself,

then soon stopped. They did not meet a living soul, since all the peasants, on Sunday, were above in the village, some going to Mass, some doing shopping, some for amusement. Perhaps down there at Montelusa nobody had stayed beside Giurlannu Zaru, who would be dying all alone, if he were still living.

They did find him alone indeed, in the bad-smelling stable-shed, stretched out on the straw as Saro and Neli had left him : livid, enormous, unrecognisable. His breath was rattling in his throat.

Through the barred window, near the manger, the sun entered, striking on his face that appeared no longer human : the nose having quite disappeared in the swollen mass ; the lips black and horribly puffed up. And the rattling came from those lips, exasperated, like a growling. In his curly black hair a bit of straw was gleaming in the sun.

The three men stopped suddenly to look at him, frightened and as if kept back by horror at that sight. The mule clattered noisily over the cobbled floor of the stable. Then Saro Tortorici went up to the dying man and called him lovingly :

"Giurla, Giurla, here's the doctor."

Neli went to tie up the mule to the manger, near which, upon the wall, there seemed to be the shadow of another animal, the trace of the donkey that lived in the stable, marked upon the wall with constant rubbing.

Giurlannu Zaru, at a second call, stopped his breath rattling. He tried to open his blood-shot eyes, darkened and full of fear, he opened his horrible mouth and groaned, as if burnt inside :

"I'm dying !"

"No, no," Saro, agonised, hastened to reply. "Here's the doctor. We brought him here ; do you see him ?"

"Carry me to the village !" pleaded Zaru with difficulty, not being able to close his lips. "Oh, good God !"

"Yes, look, here's the mule," Saro answered at once.

"Even in my arms, if necessary, Giurla. I'll carry you

there !” said Neli, running and leaning over him. “Don’t be afraid !”

Giurlannu turned round on hearing Neli’s voice, looked at him with those blood-shot eyes as if at first he did not recognise him, then moved an arm and took hold of his belt.

“You, boy ? You ?”

“I ? Yes, surely ! You’re crying ? Don’t cry, Giurla, don’t cry—it’s nothing !”

And he placed a hand on the chest that was shaking with sobs that could not break through his throat. Then Zaru, suffocated, shook his head fiercely, lifted a hand, took Neli by his neck and drew him towards him.

“We were going to be married on the same day . . . !”

“And we shall be married together, don’t you fear !” said Neli, lifting the hand that was tightening around his neck.

Meanwhile the doctor had been looking at the dying man. It was clear : a case of anthrax.

“Tell me, do you remember being bitten by an insect ?”

“No,” motioned Zaru with his head.

“Insect ?” asked Saro.

The doctor explained the disease as best he could to the two peasants. Some animal must have died of anthrax nearby. Who knows how many insects might have settled on the carrion thrown to the bottom of some ravine. One of them later flying about must have inoculated the disease in Zaru lying in the stable.

While he was speaking thus, Zaru had turned his face to the wall.

No one knew it, and yet death was there still ; so small that it could hardly be perceived, if anybody had thought of looking for it.

It was a fly, there on the wall, appearing motionless but, on looking closely, one saw it now putting out its little proboscis and sucking up it, now swiftly cleaning its two slender fore-legs, rubbing them together as if satisfied.

Zaru noticed it and stared at it hard.

A fly——

It might have been that one, or another. Who knows? Because now, hearing the doctor speak, he seemed to remember. Yes, the day before, when he had thrown himself down there to sleep, waiting for his cousins to finish shelling Lopes' almonds, a fly had annoyed him. Could it be this one?

He saw it suddenly start to fly and he followed it with his gaze.

It had gone to settle on Neli's cheek. From his cheek, it was now slowly running in two movements on to his chin, till it reached the razor-cut and remained there greedily.

Giurlannu Zaru watched it there for a bit, intently, absorbed. Then with choked-up difficulty, he asked in a hollow voice :

"Could it be a fly?"

"A fly? And why not?" answered the doctor. Giurlannu Zaru said no more ; he continued to gaze at the fly which Neli, as if stupefied by the doctor's words, did not brush off. He, Zaru, paid no heed to the doctor, but he was glad that, by speaking, he so absorbed the attention of his cousin as to make him stand still as a statue so as not to let him notice the tickling of that fly on his chin.

Oh ! if it were the same one ! Then they would indeed be married together ! He was seized by a deep envy, a blind, fierce jealousy of his young handsome cousin, for whom life remained full of promise, while it was failing him, Zaru——

Suddenly, Neli, as if at last he felt himself being bitten, lifted a hand, chased off the fly, and with his fingers started to stroke his chin, on the little cut. He turned to Zaru and was a little disconcerted, seeing him open those horrible lips in a monstrous smile. They stared at each other for a while. Then Zaru said almost without wishing to :

"The fly——"

Neli did not understand, and came nearer to listen.

"What did you say?" "The fly——" he repeated. "Which? Where?" demanded Neli, dismayed, looking at the doctor.

"There, where you are scratching yourself. I'm sure of it," said Zaru. Neli showed the cut on his chin to the doctor.

"What have I got there? It itches. . . ."

The doctor looked at it, knitting his brows; then, as if he wished to see better, led him outside the stable. Saro followed him.

What happened then? Giurlannu Zaru waited, waited a long time, with an anxiety that gripped within. He heard people speaking outside, confusedly. Suddenly Saro re-entered the stable furiously, seized the mule and, without even turning round to look at him, went out crying:

"Ah, my poor little Neli! Ah. My poor little Neli!"

Then it was true? And there they were abandoning him thus, like a dog? He tried to raise himself on one elbow, called out twice: "Saro! Saro!"

Silence. Nobody. He lifted himself up no longer, falling back into his lying position, he started to grunt a bit, in order not to hear the silence of the country-side, which frightened him. Suddenly he thought that he must have been dreaming and had had some nightmare, in his fever; but, on turning again to the wall, he saw the fly there once more.

There it was.

Now it put out its little proboscis and sucked up it, now it swiftly cleaned its slender legs, rubbing them together, as if satisfied.

(From the 5th volume of "Novelle per un Anno."
Firenze, Bemporad, Publishers.)

(II)

THE NURSE

(Translated by Miss M. LANKESTER)

I

"A T L A S T !" exclaimed Signora Manfroni, snatching from the servant's hand the letter from Rome for which she had been longing so much. In this letter her son-in-law, Ennio Mori, had promised to tell her every little detail about her daughter Ersilia's recent confinement.

She put on her spectacles and started to read at once.

She already knew from earlier telegrams that the confinement had been laborious, but that her daughter nevertheless was in no danger. But now the letter gave her to understand that Ersilia had really been in some danger and that there had even been need of an obstetrician. Mori told her this news certainly not in order to alarm his wife's parents, now that everything, good or bad, was over ; but to complain of her stubbornness, for, instead of following his wise advice, she had insisted upon wearing her corsets too tight and her heels too high right up to the last minute.

"You fool ! High heels ! . . .

And several times Signora Manfroni, boiling, repeated that "Fool" as she read the letter. Suddenly she started, more angry than ever, raised her eyes from the letter, and looked about her, as if she were looking for somebody upon whom to vent her annoyance.

"What ? What ?"

Oh, so the nurse wasn't to be a woman from Rome ? And why not, Signor Mori the barrister ? Nurses from Rome are too greedy ? . . . Oh here we are, it's economy now ! As if Ersilia's dowry did not allow such a luxury to the Socialist barrister ! Oh yes ! and meanwhile what a fine figure Ersilia would make walking through the streets of Rome with a rough Sicilian peasant-girl beside her, dressed up as a nurse, and who would have to be washed six or seven times !

"Fool ! Fool ! Fool !"

"Hullo ! Aren't we going to have anything to eat to-day ? Why isn't the table laid yet ?" Signor Manfroni came in, shouting out thus, as he usually did. He had already scolded the housemaid and the cook.

"Quietly, Saverio, quietly," said his wife, "you know perfectly well that there's a lot to do in this house."

"A lot to do ? You ? And what about me ?"

"Here, read this, read the fine letter that your dear son-in-law has sent."

"Ersilia ?"

"You'll see."

Signor Manfroni calmed himself at once ; looked through the letter ; then folding it up again said :

"Very well ! I know the nurse they want."

Signor Manfroni quite often had these flashes, in which he was sometimes wrong, and to which—in his own belief—he owed his considerable commercial fortune.

With a mocking air of disbelief Signora Manfroni asked :

"And who is she ?"

"The wife of Titta Marullo."

"The wife of that gallows-bird ?"

"You be quiet !"

"The wife of that mob-leader ?"

"Shut up !"

"The wife of a convict !"

"Let me speak !" cried Manfroni. "You're a woman and you must know that the Lord God has put sawdust here, sawdust, my dear, sawdust instead of brains. With the fine social conditions in which we live to-day——"

"What have social conditions got to do with it ?" asked his wife bewildered.

"A lot to do with it, indeed !" snapped back Saverio furiously. "Because we, we who have succeeded, by hard work and by pert——, what's the word ? perticacity, that is to say, no—yes, that's right, perticacity, in putting aside a certain amount, we, to-day, you must know, against the future which becomes gradually darker and more threatening—do you understand ?"

"No ! what do you want me to understand ?"

"There ! Didn't I say so ? Sawdust !"

He seized a chair, drew it near to the one upon which his wife was seated, sat down upon it angrily, snorting.

"Titta Marullo——" he began again, forcing himself to speak in a whisper so that the servants should not hear him, "you must know I sent away Titta Marullo from the bakery because of his revolutionary ideas."

"Which are similar to those of Signor Mori to whom you have married your daughter !"

"Let me speak !" yelled Signor Manfroni." And why did I give him my daughter ? First of all because Ennio is an excellent young man ; then, yes, madam, because he's a Socialist ! And it was convenient for me to do so ! And it has amused me ! Could you tell me why I am so greatly respected by all those creatures whom I feed ? Sawdust ! But Ennio doesn't come into this—We were speaking of Titta Marullo. I sent him away from the bakery. Left on the pavement, the poor devil managed to get himself sent to the island, to the penal settlement. Now I, a rich man, but with something inside me that beats and which, you must know, is called a heart, I will take his wife, put her in a third class carriage and send her to Rome, as a nurse for my little grandson !"

Signor Manfroni might have a hundred and one reasons, but he also had on his cheek a most ridiculous wart at which his wife stared fixedly and coldly, all the more spiteful as she felt herself constrained to submit to those reasons. And Signor Manfroni seeing her stare so often at the wart felt such a nervous irritation that, so as not to make a fool of himself, he cut short the discussion. He rang the bell, and told the servant :

"Tell Lisi to come here, to come here at once."

Lisi, who acted as coachman and man-servant, appeared on the threshold coatless, with his shirt sleeves rolled up and his mouth open, in a mute laugh, as he always did whenever his master or mistress summoned him to their presence. Signor Manfroni, upon seeing him for the first time, had discovered an extraordinary genius in the boy.

"Do you know where Titta Marullo's wife is ?"

"Yes, sir, I understand," answered Lisi, and he lifted a shoulder and twisted himself about, while a silly smile almost reached his ears.

"What do you understand, fool ?" Manfroni cried ; he was not in the mood to admire him at that moment.

Lisi wound himself up again, as if his master had paid him a fine compliment, and answered :

"I'm going to tell her, yes, sir."

"Tell her to come here at once. I want to speak to her."

And a short time from that moment, Signor Manfroni had an illuminating proof of Lisi's uncommon genius. Imagine that, while he was still at table with his wife, he saw Annicchia, the wife of Titta, come bursting into the room ; she was weeping with joy, and she held in her arms a tiny baby about two months old.

"Ah, master ! my master ! let me kiss your hand !"

And exclaiming thus she knelt at his feet. The serving-girl and the cook appeared at the door in order to see what was happening, and Lisi in front of them was laughing, triumphant and happy.

A battle was being waged between Saverio's eye and eyebrows : his eyes were trying to open wide with sudden surprise ; and at the same time his eyebrows were trying to frown with rage. He at once drew back the hand the girl wanted to kiss ; he looked towards the door and shouted :

"Get out ! No, you stay here, Lisi ! What did you tell her ?"

"That Titta will come back !" exclaimed Annicchia, without getting up. "That you had got him freed, sir !"

Manfroni rose to his feet, and brandished the chair.

"You just wait, you brute !"

Lisi fled away like a hare.

"Isn't it true ?" asked Annicchia, seized with doubt, turning to Signor Manfroni.

And she got up slowly. It needed a lot of persuasion to make her understand that the liberation of her husband did not depend, nor could possibly depend in any way, upon the wishes or goodwill of Signor Manfroni. He pointed out that even if he had sent Titta away from the bakery, she herself was a witness of the great lenience he had shown, solely on her account, she who from a child had grown up in his house and had been Ersilia's playmate for so many years.

While her husband gave these explanations, Signora Manfroni was observing the girl and, in imagination, was dressing her up as a nurse, nodding approval as though she already

saw her wearing a clumsy red cap on her head and a big pin with trembling silver flowers in her fair hair.

Annicchia, when Signor Manfroni had told her the reason why he had sent Lisi to call for her, remained half stunned and half perplexed.

"And my little baby?" she said, showing it. "Whom shall I leave him to?"

She clasped him to her breast, and started to cry again.

"Dada isn't coming back, Luzzi! He isn't coming back!"

Then, uncovering her tear-stained face, she added turning to Signora Manfroni:

"He doesn't know him; he hasn't seen him yet, this darling little angel who has been born to him."

"You could get somebody to bring him up with a little of the money you'll have from Ersilia."

"Oh, for Signorina Ersilia," Annicchia hastened to say, "You know how willing I am to do anything for her! But . . . it's too far! In Rome!"

Saverio explained there and then that with the trains and boats, distance was nothing nowadays.

"Yes, sir," said Annicchia. "You are right, sir; but I am a poor ignorant woman; I should get lost. I've never been a step beyond the village. And then," she added, "you know I have my mother-in-law with me, sir; how could I leave her, poor old woman? We two are left alone. Titta recommended her to me so often! And if you knew how we lived! I with my arms tied by this little creature; she, an old woman of seventy years! I wanted to have my little boy nursed somewhere else, and go into service. Now Titta won't find any of the lovely things that were bought when we married; poor people's things, you know, but clean. All sold at a low price to one person or another. But the old woman doesn't want me to go into service. She's proud; she doesn't want me to. However, since it's for Signorina Ersilia, perhaps . . . Well, I shall try and tell her about it."

"Yes, but we want an answer at once. You will have to go to-morrow morning at the latest."

Annicchia looked perplexed once more.

"I'll go and see, and then I can tell you Yes or No," she said at last, and went away.

She lived in an alley near by. Already all the neighbours, hearing Lisi's news, as joyful as it was untrue, had crowded into the bare little room on the ground floor, around the prisoner's old mother, who remained sitting, huddled up, with a black handkerchief on her head tied under her chin ; her knotted old hands resting on a rough earthenware pan that was upon her knees. They were all praising Manfroni's kindness and generosity and the old woman, with her head lowered, uttered from time to time a sort of little grunt, either of approval or displeasure, shooting from her eyes certain glances that expressed diffidence and annoyance. When Annicchia appeared at the door, and her aspect and first words froze upon the neighbours' lips the admiration they were about to express for Manfroni, the old woman raised her head and looked disdainfully at the other women round her ; then, hearing of Manfroni's offer, she rose to her feet.

"What did you answer him ?"

Annicchia shot a glance towards the neighbours, as if to say :
"You make her understand that I've got to accept."

"I answered him that I should come and tell you, mother."

"I don't wish it, I don't wish it !" the old woman cried at once, angrily.

"I don't want to either, but . . ." And again Annicchia turned for help to the women around her. At last, first one and then another, they endeavoured to persuade the old woman of the reasons for which her daughter-in-law should not lose the chance offered to her of providing honestly for her baby and herself. One even, who had come with her baby son in her arms, sucking an enormous teat :

"Here ! Here ! Look !" she started to cry, "I've milk enough for two ! I will take him, I'll take the baby. . . . Here, look !" And taking the nipple out of the baby's little mouth, lifting the breast in one hand, she squirted her milk in the faces of the women near her who, laughing and pro-

tecting themselves with their arms, kept off, getting behind each other's backs.

But the old woman would not consent ; she rebelled against all their persuasion, shouting out to her daughter-in-law :

"If you go, it is against my will, and you'll have my curses! Just remember that !"

II

At the station, the barrister Ennio Mori was awaiting the arrival of the train from Naples. Short of stature, extremely thin, his head sunk between his shoulders, he was fuming with impatience, either scratching his bony face, of a jaundiced complexion, invaded and almost oppressed by an overgrown black beard, or adjusting the spectacles that would not sit straight on his nose ; or else now and then he would feel the pockets of his overcoats or jackets, full of newspapers.

He went up to a railway official.

"Excuse me, when's the train from Naples ?"

"It's forty minutes late."

"Italian railways ! Madmen's things !"

And he went away, in search of some place where he might sit down ; there at the back under the clock, upon some projecting point of the wall, since all the seats were packed. He was having to act even as servant to the nurse who was arriving :

"Madmen's things !"

After two years of marriage and residence in Rome, his wife had gradually dropped the ways of that tribe of savages from the extreme end of Sicily. She was neither able to move about the house nor to go out alone to provide the smallest needs of the household. All she was able to do was to scold him from morning to evening, continually angry, and to nag him about the things he cared for most, particularly in his logic ; and to afflict him with the most stupid and hateful jealousy, not because she loved him, but because she made a point of it. She did not feel that she was loved ! Of course !

What had she ever done that she should be loved ? It almost seemed that she took a pleasure in getting herself hated ! Never a gentle word, never a caress, never ! And always armed with diffidence, sharp, hard, surly and touchy. Oh, good Lord ! He'd made a fine bargain in marrying her !

"Madmen's things !"

He snorted and adjusted his spectacles upon his nose once more ; drew from his pocket one of the many newspapers it contained, and started to read.

Yet even in reading it was the same as when he was arguing with his wife at home ; he was not able to find a moment's peace, and almost at every bit of news he read he repeated his usual phrase : "Madmen's things !" He persisted in his reading, however ; every day he was not satisfied unless he had read through and through all the more important local papers of Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin and Florence, with which his pockets were always stuffed.

"They're medicine," he was wont to say, "they calm down my bile."

Too much, however ! The doctor himself had told him so. Too much, yes, perhaps ; but then, if he did not read the newspapers, would not the direct contact with the charming Italian life, the company of his wife, destroy his liver entirely ? Then he'd better stick to his papers.

"And this cursed train from Naples, is it going to arrive, or is it not ?"

He looked at the clock, and sprang to his feet anxiously. A whole hour had passed. ! He ran hurriedly towards the exit. Wherever was he going to find the poor woman now ? She must have arrived by this time, and she did not know his address.

But he found her, luckily, in the customs office, where the luggage is examined ; she was sitting on her bag, weeping. The customs officers were endeavouring to comfort her, advising her to go in search of the "black barrister" of whom she spoke, since they did not know him.

"Annicchia !"

"Master !" cried the poor girl, leaping to her feet at the sound of his voice. And she almost embraced him in her joy. She was trembling all over.

"I was lost, master ; lost . . . And whatever should I have done if your Lordship hadn't arrived ?"

"But could not that worthy gentleman, my father-in-law, have written my address on a piece of paper for you ?" shouted Mori.

"But I can't read," observed Annicchia, who was forcing herself to stifle her last sobs, and was drying her tears.

"Madmen's things. You could have given the address to a cabman, without bothering me to come here and look for you. However, I've come. I was on the platform. I didn't notice when the train came in. Well ! . . ."

Getting into a cab, he warned her:

"Don't tell my wife a word of this incident. There would be hell's own row."

He drew another paper from his pocket and began to read.

Annicchia shrunk back, to take up as little room as possible in the cab. She felt immensely constrained, sitting there beside her master, alone with him. But this constraint was short-lived. During the long journey, she had been stunned by the thousands of new impressions that had tumultuously seized her poor mind, which had up till then been closed and restricted in the daily occupation of her narrow life. She could not remember a thing ; she could not see or think of anything ; she only felt a great relief at having ended her journey at last. Relief at having overcome her terror of the crossing on the boat from Palermo to Naples, her fear of the train's fury. Where had she got to ? She tried to look out of the cab, but her eyes hurt. She would have plenty of time later to see Rome, the great city where the Pope lived ! Meanwhile, she found herself beside somebody she knew, and in a short time she would see her "little mistress" once more, and then she would almost feel herself at home once more. She smiled. For an instant there crossed her mind the thought of her son far away, and of her mother-in-law, but

she chased the picture away at once with the instinctive desire not to trouble herself in that moment of relief, after the long agonised suffering of the journey.

Suddenly Mori asked her :

"Did somebody come to find you on the boat at Naples?"

"Oh, yes, sir! A gentleman. He was so good. . . ."
Annicchia hastened to reply. "And he ordered me to give you his regards."

"He ordered you to?"

"Yes, sir, to give you his regards."

"He might have *asked* you to."

"Yes, sir, but . . . he was a gentleman."

Ennio Mori snorted and turned again to his paper.

"Medicine! Medicine!"

"I beg your pardon?" ventured Annicchia timidly.

"Nothing. I'm talking to myself."

Annicchia was rather perplexed, then she added :

"At Palermo also another gentleman came to the station and he showed me on to the boat : and he was so good to me too."

"And I suppose he too *ordered* you to give me his greetings."

"Yes, sir ; he too."

Mori lowered his paper on to his knees ; adjusted his spectacles on his nose, and asked her, frowning :

"Your husband?"

"Still there!" sighed Annicchia. "On the island! Oh, if your Lordship, you who live here in Rome where the king is. . . ."

"Be quiet!" Mori interrupted her snappily, as if by mentioning the king the girl had given him a violent kick.

"One little word would be enough," Annicchia added courageously in a subdued tone.

"Madmen's things!" snorted Mori again ; he was so roused that he crumpled up the newspaper he held on his knees, and flung it out of the cab. "Do you think that it's only your husband they've sent there to penal servitude? They send us there too!"

"Gentlemen?" asked Annicchia, amazed and incredulous. "How can they send gentlemen there?"

"Be quiet!" replied Mori, to whom this frank ignorance was fast becoming insupportable. And gloomily he started to reflect upon the hopeless enterprise of infusing a new self-consciousness in that remote people of his Sicily, in whom the feeling of servitude was so deeply rooted.

At last the cab entered the Via Sistina where Mori lived.

Ersilia was still in bed. Beneath the pink tapestry of the canopy over the wide bed, she looked darker than the colour of carnations, almost black, thin as she had become with the pain of her recent confinement.

Annicchia ran to embrace her joyfully.

"Mistress! my mistress! Here I am! . . . It seems as if I'm dreaming! How are you? You have suffered a lot, haven't you? Oh, my dear! It's quite evident . . . I hardly recognise you . . . But there, it's as God wishes: we women are made to suffer."

"Piffle!" protested Ersilia. "What fools women are. . . All the same! We take a pleasure, don't we, in repeating that we women are made to suffer! And by dint of our repeating it, there they are, those men, who now believe that indeed we women must be at their service, for their need and their pleasure. We are the slaves, indeed, and they are the masters! . . . Piffle!"

Ennio Mori, at whom the kick was directed, angrily folded up his third newspaper, snorted and went out of the room.

Annicchia looked at her mistress, rather perplexed, and said:

"They too, the poor dears, have so many troubles . . ."

"Yes, sleep, eat and go out for walks. I'd like to change over for a bit, I should. Good heavens! All men are blind in one eye."

"Certainly, when we have only just finished suffering for them . . ."

"No, always! I hate them all!"

At this point Ennio Mori was heard to shout from the next room:

"The universal world !"

To which came another cry in answer :

"Here I am, sir ! At your service !"

Ersilia burst out laughing, and explained to Annicchia :

"I have a deaf servant. Whenever anyone shouts a little, she thinks she is being called. Margherita ! Margherita !

An old deaf woman appeared on the threshold, with a half-offended, half-terrified look. In there, Mori with his eyes starting from their sockets, had made a gesture at her . . . a certain ungainly gesture.

"Listen, Margherita," continued Ersilia, "This is the nurse, she has only just arrived, this minute. Very well : now you go and show her her room. Do you understand ? And you go and wash yourself," she added turning to Annicchia, "You're all covered with soot."

Annicchia craned her neck to look in the wardrobe mirror and immediately exclaimed, raising her hands in the air :

"Good Lord !"

The smoke of the train and the tears she had shed at the station had covered her face with dirt. Before going to wash herself, however, she wanted to tell "her little missie," with lively gestures and frequent exclamations which caused deep amazement to the deaf servant, the various adventures of the sea journey, then of the one in the train, and how at one time, feeling her breast bursting with the force of the milk in them, she had started to cry like a child. Her travelling companions had asked her what was the matter ; but she was ashamed to tell them ! in the end, they understood. Then a horrid boy had offered to suck her milk himself—the beast !—and had even stretched out his hands to her breast, laughing. She screaming, had almost threatened to throw herself out of the carriage window. But then luckily, at the first stop, an old man who was sitting beside her had taken her into the next compartment, where there was a woman who had a little baby with her, three months old. It was a poor miserable little thing, and she had finally been able to give it her milk, feeling herself growing gradually better.

Ersilia considered herself as already "continental," and yet she felt disgusted at those lively, ingenuous expressions of peasant modesty.

"Yes, well, that will do. Go and have a wash now. Then come back and tell me about my mother and father. Run along."

"And the little baby?" asked Annicchia. "Won't you let me see him? I just want to see him, then I'll go at once."

"There," said Ersilia, pointing to the cradle. "But not you, no, you mustn't touch the veil with your dirty hands. Margherita, you show him to her."

Among much richness of ribbons, veils and laces, Annicchia saw an ugly little object with a red face, more wretched than the baby she had suckled in the train. Yet she said :

"Oh, pretty ! My pretty little heart, he's sleeping like a little angel. . . . Your Ladyship shall see how fine I shall make him. . . . My little Luzziddu was born like this too, very tiny, and now, if you saw him !"

She stopped, perturbed ; then said :

"I'm going now, and I'll come back," and followed the servant into the other room.

III

She was very anxious to hold the baby to her breast at once, and her master agreed with her ; but Ersilia, who contradicted her husband in everything, wanted to have her milk examined by a doctor first.

"Is there any need of a doctor?" said Annicchia laughing. "Don't you see how well I am?" She was glowing with health, fresh and rosy. Ersilia from the bed glared at her spitefully, as if she, with those words, had wished to attract the attention of her husband.

"The doctor ! I want the doctor at once !" she insisted.

And Mori, grumbling his usual phrase, had to go off for the doctor.

He came towards the evening, when Annicchia already was

in agony once more on account of her swollen breasts, and the baby, who could not suck those of his mother which were dry, was desperate, starving.

Ennio wanted to be present at the examination, but his wife sent him away :

"What do you want to see ? Go and tell Margherita to bring a spoon and a glass of water."

"Fair, eh ? . . . fair . . . fair." The doctor was saying. He had a habit of repeating the same word three or four times on end, gazing with an abstracted air as if he always had difficulty in fixing his thoughts.

Annicchia, seeing herself observed in this way, became as red as a poppy.

"Fair, eh ? Let us say, madam," the doctor rambled on meanwhile. "Fair, isn't she, madam ? A fine girl . . . beautiful, and she seems healthy, yes, healthy But dark, eh, a dark girl would have been better. . . . The milk of dark women, yes, the milk of dark women Well, let's see."

He made Annicchia raise her head and examined the glands of her neck ; after other observations, he distractedly started to unbutton her blouse. Annicchia, trembling with shame, amazed and embarrassed, tried to prevent him, covering her breast with her hands.

"Take them away, eh, take them away," the doctor said to her.

Ersilia burst out laughing.

"Why . . . why are you . . . why are you laughing, madam ?"

"But don't you see how ashamed this silly girl is ? " Ersilia pointed out to him.

"Of me ? I am the doctor !"

"She's not used to one," went on Ersilia. " And then, our women, you know, we Sicilians are not at all like the women here."

"Ah," said the doctor suddenly. "I understand, I understand. . . . I know very well . . . very well. . . more modest, eh ? More modest. . . . But I am the doctor ; a

doctor's like the confessor. Let's see ; here, squeeze out a few drops yourself, into this glass. How long have you had your son ?"

"I bought him," said Annicchia, forcing herself to look him in the face, "about two months ago."

"You bought him ? What do you mean ?"

"What ought I to say ?"

"Bore, my girl, or made. Children are made. . . . You make them. What's wrong ?"

When the doctor finally went away, after having examined the milk, Annicchia dropped down on to a chair, exhausted, as if she had gone through some tremendous strain.

"Oh, my lady, what shame ! I thought I should die."

After a short while, hearing the baby cry, she ran to the cradle and at once offered it her breast.

"Here, fill yourself up, my beautiful boy, my darling little pet."

Ersilia, from the bed, glared at her again ; saw her fair golden hair, parted down the middle into two tresses that were plaited round her ears and framed her delicate face ; she caught sight of her breast, marvellously white and shapely, and said to her, vexed :

"It would be better to look after him first ; and then to nurse him till he goes to sleep."

"Let him drink, poor little thing !" exclaimed Annicchia. "He's terribly hungry ! If you knew how he's sucking, sucking !"

A little later, in the room nearby which was prepared for her and the baby, she could not cease to exclaim, admiring the furniture and the bed curtains.

"Jesus ! What things there are in Rome ! What wonderful things !"

And she felt embarrassed in front of that new bed, such a beautiful one, and prepared for her. Then she remembered the greater embarrassment she had felt, two years back, at the sight of another bed, in which for the first time she had had to sleep, not alone ; in her thoughts she saw once more

her little house, now far away, as it had been when Titta, without those wicked ideas that had ruined him, had built it lovingly, for their wedding ; then as it was now, bare and squalid, with hardly two chairs and one bed for herself and her mother-in-law.

Now the old woman had it all to herself down there, that double bed, since the baby was probably sleeping in their neighbour's house. Poor Luzziddu, so tiny, away from his home, and with his mummie so far away ! Surely that woman would not take the same care of him as of her own son ; and Luzziddu, left on one side, would have to wait quietly for the little that was left ; he who, till now, had had his mummie all to himself ! Annicchia started to cry ; but then, fearing that someone should hear her, she dried her tears and, to comfort herself, reminded herself that nearby, on guard, there was his granny, who, upon occasions could make herself felt, with her gloomy, imperious manner. A worthy mother to Titta ! But she was good at heart, just as Titta was ! Surely in time she would be convinced that if her daughter-in-law had dared to disobey her, she had been forced to it by necessity and for the good of all concerned.

Now, almost as if to prove to herself that it had been a sacrifice for her, and that in performing it she had thought of others and not herself, she would have liked to sleep on the floor and not there, on that lordly bed, under those curtains. The baby should be there, since all this richness was spread for him, and she on the ground, like a dog. She had not the heart to get under those blankets, thinking of the straw upon which her Luzziddu and her mother-in-law were lying.

But a few days from then, the absurd pompous costume which the dressmaker brought was to offend her far more in this secret feeling of hers. Were they really for her, all these fineries, embroidered aprons, satin ribbons, and silver pins ? And must she go out of doors like this, as if she were going to a fancy dress ball ?

Ersilia, who had by now left her bed, scolded her bitterly.

"Good heavens ! What grimaces ! It's what I had expected.

It is the custom here, and you've got to dress like that, whether it pleases you or not."

"Just as your Ladyship desires," Annicchia hastened to reply in order to calm her. "I beg your pardon. Your Ladyship has spent such a lot of fine money for me who deserve nothing. And then, what does it matter about me? Your Ladyship is mistress. . . . I was only saying that it seems queer . . . because in our country. . . ."

"We're in Rome here," Ersilia cut her short. "Besides, you look very well in it."

It was true. The flaming red of the bonnet gave a strong relief to the fairness of her hair and to the blue of her clear gay eyes. Ersilia realised at once that when she went out for walks with her she herself would cut a poor figure; but her vanity and ambition to see her nurse richly dressed were stronger in her than jealousy itself.

She took her out with her, the first time, in a carriage. Annicchia, blushing hot in the face with shyness, kept her eyes lowered, fixed upon the baby in her lap. But Ersilia noticed that all the people in the street stopped to turn round and look at her.

"Here," she said, "hold your head up. We don't want to be stared at. You look as though somebody has boxed your ears!"

Annicchia tried to raise her eyes and to hold her head up. Little by little the wonder of the unaccustomed and grandiose sights of the town caused her to forget her shyness, and she stared in awed amazement where Ersilia pointed out to her, murmuring to herself:

"Jesus! Jesus! What wonderful things! What things . . ."

She returned home from that first outing stunned and dizzy, with her ears humming, as if she had been in the middle of some great noise and had had great difficulty in escaping it. And she felt herself very far from her own country, much farther than she had ever imagined, almost lost in another world that did not seem real to her as yet.

"Jesus! Jesus!"

Meanwhile in another room, Mori had given his wife a letter to read, one that had arrived from Sicily during her absence.

Signora Manfroni wrote to her daughter that Marulla's old mother had sent back the money which she, according to an agreement with Annicchia, had forwarded to her from the first month of Annicchia's wages as nurse. The old woman declared that she would not even look at it from a distance, and said she would rather die or beg a crust of bread from door to door. In the meanwhile the neighbour, to whose care Annicchia had entrusted her baby, had come to her to complain of the old hag, who would not give her a thing, not even to provide for the wants of the child. Signora Manfroni added that she had given this woman half of the month's pay, on condition that she should every day give the old woman a plate of soup so that she should not die of starvation, and to make it seem to be her own charity, not coming from anybody else. She advised her daughter not to send the other half for the old woman would never accept it, and concluded by declaring her annoyance at having been driven into this trouble by having consented to follow the advice of others.

"That's your fine advice !" snapped Ersilia. "You can never get anything right !"

"I ?" Ennio cried back. "And I suppose that I wrote to your worthy lady mother telling her to choose as my nurse the daughter-in-law of a furious madwoman ?"

"No, but you insisted on having a Sicilian. If you hadn't had that splendid idea, we shouldn't find ourselves in these muddles now. I know, mind you, I know that the little Sicilian nurse pleases you a lot. I've noticed that already !"

Mori opened his eyes wide with surprise.

"My son's nurse ?"

"That's right ! Shout it out, so that everyone can hear you !"

"First you prick me, and then you don't want me to shout ? Jealous even of my son's nurse now ? Are you mad ?"

"You are mad ! But look here ! What are we to do with this money ?"

"I hope you won't go and tell her straight out that her mother-in-law refuses it."

"What do you think I am? Give her that to worry about? I shall be very careful not to!"

Mori lost patience, and shrugging his shoulders angrily, he went away.

IV

So that was what it amounted to now; he must refrain from caressing, or even turning his glance towards his little son, because his wife suspected that the nurse might interpret those caresses and those looks as being directed to her.

"And why," she demanded in fact, "why don't you pay any attention to my son when I'm holding him, going instead to make all those grimaces when he's with her?"

Disgusted and despising that unjust and hateful suspicion, Ennio shouted out:

"But he's never with you!"

The baby, every time she took him in her arms, would start to cry and hold out his tiny hands to the nurse. Perhaps she held him badly, not because she was unused to it, but for fear that in doing so she might soil her rich dresses of which she was so proud.

Although she never received any visits and very rarely went out of the house, she spent enormous sums on her clothes, of which she always grew discontented as she was of herself and everything else. She considered herself unhappy, and perhaps she really was so, but she blamed others for this unhappiness of hers and plagued them with her contrary nature and lack of all human kindness. She was convinced that, had she fallen in with some other man who would have loved and understood her, she would never have experienced the emptiness she felt around and within her. Now even her baby had become tiresome to her because he so clearly showed that he liked his nurse better than his mother. And hardly a day passed when she did not cry secretly to herself, plunged in her

weary idleness. Her husband sometimes saw that her eyes were red and swollen, but he pretended not to have noticed ; he avoided speaking to her as much as possible, since he realised now that, whatever he said or did, he could never inspire in her or communicate to her that affection for life for which she felt a frenzied desire, but of which, at the same time, she was incapable. She expected to find life in others, not understanding that everyone must make it for himself. Besides, if she was unhappy, then no less so was the man who had to live in the same house with her. A fine life was his ! All day long shut up in his study. It wasn't so bad when every now and then friends who were of his party came to see him ; with them at least he could say what he felt, and discuss freely.

During those discussions, the old study clerk was sent out of the room. He always bowed very deeply, did Signor Felicissimo Ramicelli, to the revolutionary gentlemen, and went out with dignity. Hardly had he crossed the threshold, however, when he would wink an eye, raise a foot and rub his hands together contentedly. Then twirling up the ends of his dyed moustaches, he would go and sit on a bench in the entrance hall, in the hope of seeing Annicchia, the pretty little Sicilian nurse.

He had already tried to open conversation with her.

"Do you know what my name is ? Felicissimo. 'Very happy' !"

But Annicchia seemed not to hear. She turned back towards him ; and Signor Ramicelli murmured to himself :

"Felicissimo, maybe ! But of what ?"

They had imposed this fine superlative name upon him as a prediction—Thanks !—But as it was, he had never found anything in life of which he could call himself even just contented, let alone happy. He earned eight little lire a day ; this would have sufficed him perhaps, if he had not a little vice, a certain little vice . . . "Well, what can a man do ? Pretty little women—" That Annicchia, for example, what a superb little mouth she had ! Every time he saw her, his mouth watered.

And she seemed to be a good girl, too ; she *seemed*, do you understand ? Because all nurses, it's a known thing, are girls who have gone wrong.

Annicchia, noticing the looks, the monkey caresses of Signor Ramicelli, did not know whether to laugh at him or to take offence. The little old man whose hair was still so fair seemed very funny to her ! Certainly, if he had not entirely lost his brain already, there couldn't be much of it left !

Down in the entrance hall she was trying to see if the baby could walk, holding him under the arms. She had not yet succeeded, after six months, in pronouncing correctly the name which Mori had bestowed upon the child : Leonida. She called him Nonida.

"But why Nonida ?" said Signor Ramicelli, to tease her, "LE-O-nida."

"I can't say it."

"And Felicissimo ? Can't you say Felicissimo either ? That's what I'm called, you know ?"

Annicchia took the baby up in her arms again and went up the stairs, saying : "I don't believe it."

"And neither do I," Signor Ramicelli concluded philosophically : he had to stay there and wait till the discussion in the study should end.

"Tactics—Cheats—the education of the proletariat—Minimum programme—" These and similar expressions reached his ears from time to time. He shook his head sadly and turned again to look at the door through which the nurse had gone, and sighed. Now and then he could just hear a certain peasant lullabye that Annicchia was singing in a soft, melancholy voice. She was thinking, perhaps, of her own baby, looking at the one she held, who, with her nursing, had grown big and strong, even bigger than hers had been when she had left him down there ! Ah, poor Luzziddu, he would have been a giant by now, surely, if she could only have nursed him ! And instead—who knows ? She often dreamed of him, sickly, terribly thin, mere skin and bones, with a little flabby neck and a big rickety head that flopped first on one little shoulder then

on the other, and which grew steadily while she watched, terrified and dismayed. "Is this my Luzziddu ? Is this what he's become ?" And in her agonised dreams she tried to give him her milk, immediately ; but the baby looked at her with the dark, savage eyes of his grandmother and turned his face away, refusing the breast she offered him. What torture ! She would wake with her heart in her mouth, and till the day came she could not shut out from her eyes the picture of her little son, reduced to such a state.

She no longer dared speak of him to her mistress, who had already answered her roughly upon several occasions, perhaps irritated by her great insistence, or perhaps because she feared that the nurse—thinking too much about her own little creature—might neglect the child. But that, she could not and ought not, in all conscience, to say ; because—"There, look at him, Nonida, flourishing and lively !"

Annicchia could hardly recognise in her mistress of to-day the Signorina Ersilia of past times, so badly was she treated ; worse than any servant. She did all she could to please her and did so many odd jobs she was not obliged to do, now that the deaf woman, Margherita, had gone ; and she forced herself to seem gay, and to cheer her mistress as well, for she would fly into tempers and get desperate over the slightest little thing.

"Yes, here I am ; I'll do it all myself ma'am, don't get bothered."

In return she looked to find a little more consideration. For example, when the letters arrived from Sicily—she would take them in to her, all joyous and expectant :

"Signorina ! Signorina !"

"What's the matter ? Have you won the lottery ?"

She froze her with those words, every time. Annicchia would wait till she finished reading the letter, hoping that she would tell some news of her baby ; but never a word ! She always had to ask her, when she was folding the letter back into the envelope :

"No news of Luzziddu ?"

"Yes, they say he's well."

"And my mother-in-law, what of her?"

"The same."

She had to be content with these answers. But was it possible that they had nothing more to say to her, down there? Oh, how she regretted now that she had never learnt to write! When she left she had realised that the great distance would prove difficult to her; but she had not imagined that it would be like this; it was real torture to her! However, in a few days the baby would be seven months old: when he was nine, according to his father's wishes, he would be weaned; then there were only two months more of this suffering. Patience!

Comforting herself thus and resigning herself to her unhappy lot, she never dreamed of what was to happen to her on the very day that the baby attained his seventh month: a day of double celebration because Nonida had also cut his first wee tooth.

That day, hearing the front door bell ring, and guessing from the sharp ringing that it was the postman, she went happily to open it, as usual; but suddenly, before she had even time to see who was there, she found herself lying on the ground, knocked over by a terrific blow. Titta Marullo, her husband, his face pale and distorted with anger, was standing over her, one foot raised, ready to kick her in the face.

"You foul bitch! Where's your mistress?"

At his shout, Mori, his wife, and Signor Ramicelli came running up. Titta Marullo, pale as death, went over to Mori, took him by his coat collar, and shaking it very quietly, said to him:

"My son is dead, do you know? Dead!" he added, turning to Annicchia, who had screamed. "And now what are you going to do about it? Will you pay me for him, or give me yours?"

"He's mad!" shouted Ersilia, trembling, terrified. Mori pushed Marullo back showing him the door, his little nervous body quivering with fury.

"Out!" he yelled. "You brute! Go out of my house at once!"

"What are you going to do?" Marullo said to him, coming up to him breast to breast. "I have nothing more to lose, so be careful! My mother is in the hospital; my son is dead! I've come to spit in your face and to take this bitch away with me. Get up, you!" he added, turning again to his wife, who had remained where she was on the floor. But at that moment Ramicelli, who had slipped away unseen, returned panting and frightened, with two Civil guards, to whom Mori, trembling all over with rage, turned, deeply stirred:

"Yes! Take this man away! He came to insult me, to threaten me in my own home, the brute!"

The two guards seized Marullo by his arms; he tried to free himself, shouting: "I want my wife!" but they led him away followed by Mori, who wanted to denounce the aggressor in the police court.

V

The next day, without any hurry, the letter came from Signora Manfroni announcing the death of the baby and of the illness of the old woman. Of Titta there was not a word.

At first Mori supposed that he had escaped from the penal settlement; but then he learnt that he had been allowed a pardon through the intercession of the magistrate, to whom his sick mother had appealed from hospital. The Rome police, meanwhile, had sent him back to Sicily, with the threat that he would be returned to his former prison if he should in the least way try to evade the special supervision under which he was placed for three years.

Annicchia had developed a high fever, caused by the fright her husband had given her and the news of the child's death. For three days it seemed that she would go mad; then her delirium and her hallucinations calmed down; she remained as if stunned, in a state of stupidity that was more disconcerting than had been her feverish ravings. She gazed about her and it seemed as if her eyes could not see; she heard what was said to her, answering yes and no with her head, but then

her movements showed that she had not understood. Her milk would not come, and the baby had to be weaned. The whole house was upside down. Ersilia, unaccustomed and clumsy at everything, had to stay up with the baby for two nights ; he wanted his nurse and would not stay quiet for one moment. She also had to attend to the house, give first instructions to the new maid ; attend also to the sick girl. She was in a rage with her husband, who kept on looking round him, a paper in his hand, not knowing what to do. But what could he do ?

"What ?" his wife shouted at him. "Move about, of course, help with something ! Don't you see I'm alone here, with nobody to help ; with the baby in my arms ; and I can't look after that woman who has caused me all this disturbance ? Go along out, try and find a place for her in some hospital !"

Ennio, at the suggestion, stopped to look at her, astonished :
"In a hospital ?"

"Pity, compassion ?" went on Ersilia, irritated. "For her, isn't it ? Not at all for me, I who sleep no longer at night, and can't even find time to comb my hair. Must I be everybody's servant ? But wait till she's on her feet again, then you'll see ! Not a day, not a minute longer shall she stay in my house !"

She did not, however, have the courage to put this threat into effect as soon as Annicchia was a bit better. She tried to approach the subject with her, saying that she was keeping at her disposition the money that her mother-in-law had refused ; but Annicchia answered her :

"But what do you think I can do with it now ? I've nothing left but him now t"

And she drew Nonida to her breast. He had gone back to her, and showed the same affection for her although he was weaned.

The first time the maid had put him down on her bed, she had felt a strong repulsion ; her own baby had died for this one ! But then, moved by the loving impatience with which the innocent little child had held out its tiny hands, she held him close in her arms, just as she would have held her own son,

and shook off the sorrow that suffocated her in an endless weeping.

The baby still sought her breast.

"Ah, baby, baby ! What do you want of me now ? I've got nothing more, I can't give anything more, neither to you nor to anybody . . . I'm no longer your mother, my darling, no longer ! . . ."

Oh, if she could have been certain how and why her baby had died, whether from lack of food or from some neglected sickness. How could she resign herself now without knowing anything about it, not a thing ? Was it possible ? Died as a little puppy would ! Oh poor little innocent, abandoned creature, without his mother beside him, without his father, without anybody, just dying among strangers. Oh God !

But who took any notice of her sorrow now ? Her mistress as angry with her on account of the child who at seven months only had been deprived of her milk. She was right, too, because she was a mother also, and could think of nothing but her own child. What did it matter to her that the other one should have died ? She could feel annoyance, but no sorrow—"Yes, but still she ought to understand—" thought Annicchia, "that her baby now belongs to me ; that if she had all the trouble of having him, I gave up my son for him, and now I have nothing else left me——"

Although Ersilia was quite willing to avoid all the bother of looking after her baby, she did not in the least wish him to become fonder of Annicchia, who already considered him as her own. And she became more determined in her resolution to send her away. Besides she was no longer obliged to keep her. She was neither capable of being a housemaid nor a nursery-maid. And then Ersilia was anxious that her little boy should learn to speak good Italian, and if he remained with his present nurse, who often spoke in dialect, that would be impossible. Therefore she must be off ! Or should she keep her because she made such a show of her beauty for Ennio's benefit ? Yes, she must go at once ! And her husband should give her notice himself.

"I ? Why should it be I ? " said Mori.

"Because you're the head of the house. And besides I don't know what ideas she's got fixed in her head, because of the pity and sympathy you have shown her on this occasion."

"I ?" repeated Ennio. "I've shown her nothing."

"Then perhaps she may have thought so. It's all the same to me, don't you see ? She thinks she's in her own home already. There are two mothers and two mistresses here now. Perhaps that's all very well for you but I won't stand it !"

Ennio, though he was making matters worse, tried to argue once more :

"But excuse me ; why will you insist on seeing wrong when there is none, creating hateful thoughts in you, when I, with my life of study, have never given you a cause for doubt ? You've just seen how, in order to have a little peace, to please you, I've even forbidden myself to fondle my own child. Do you mistrust that poor girl now ? Do you think she can enjoy the thought of going back to her home, where she'll no longer find her baby, where, instead, there is a brute who blames her for her son's death and of whom she is terrified ? Seeing that she has lost her child by coming here to nurse ours, she thinks she's acquired the right to stay in our house with this other baby for whom she sacrificed her own. Doesn't it seem quite natural to you ? Doesn't it seem reasonable ?"

He was repeating, without knowing it, what he had written before his wife entered the study to speak to him. Reflecting upon the tragic case of that child who had died down in Sicily, he had at once thought of a work by Malon, "*Le Socialisme Integral*," and instead of making it a cause of reproach to himself, he decided to make it the subject of a lecture he was to give to the Socialist Circle in a few days.

As was to be expected, Ersilia rebelled against these humanitarian reflexions and went out to the study, determined to dismiss Annicchia that very moment. Mori, exasperated, gathered up the first few notes he had already written for his lecture and threw them on the ground. Soon after, through

the closed door, he heard the despairing weeping of the poor girl and the heart-rending words with which she prayed her mistress not to send her away.

"Keep me as a servant, without giving me anything ! Give me only the crusts of bread that you have to throw away ? I'll even sleep on the ground. Don't send me away, for pity's sake ! I can't, I can't go back there. . . . Have pity on me, do it for the love of this innocent child ! If you send me away I am lost, ma'am ; I am, but I can't go back there. . . ."

That weeping and those agonised cries lasted a long time. Then Mori heard no more ; he imagined that Ersilia had relented and had allowed the girl to stay with the baby.

A short time after, Felicissimo Ramicelli entered the study without his usual dignity, his face was flushed and his eyes shining.

What a victory ! What a victory ! He almost started to rub his hands, did Signor Felicissimo Ramicelli, there under the very eyes of his master. The pretty little Sicilian nurse, dismissed just now by her mistress, would come that very evening to sleep in his house. Oh, yes, but nurses—he knew perfectly well—were all girls who had gone wrong ! This one was still pretending to be innocent, she made out to understand that he only wanted her for his servant. Oh, yes, for his servant . . . Why not ?

"Signor Ramicelli !"

"At your service, sir !"

"Listen now, clear writing, and take care, no straying above or below the line."

And Mori gave him his lecture notes to copy out.

Then he continued :

"The equality among men according to Socialism, as Malon says, must be understood in a double relative sense : First, that all men, because they are such, have assured the conditions of existence ; Secondly, that therefore all men are equal *in the point of departure* for the struggle for life, so that everyone freely unfolds his own personality in equal social conditions ; whilst now, the child who is born *healthy* and *robust*, but *poor*,

must succumb in the competition for life to the child born *feeble but rich. . . .*"

"Signor Ramicelli !"

"Yes, sir !"

"What's the matter ? Are you mad ? Why are you laughing like that ?"

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(III)

FAITH

(Translated by Miss M. LANKESTER)

IT was quiet in that humble little priest's chamber, peaceful and full of light, paved with old Valencia tiles which here and there had lost their enamelling and upon which gleamed a patch of sun, gently streaming in through a fine gold dust from the window, throwing on the floor the clear-cut shadow of the stitched window curtains till they looked as if they were printed there, and also the shadow of the little green cage that hung from the shelf, with the canary that hopped about inside. In this quiet room a smell of bread just drawn out of the oven in the courtyard below entered warmly, mingling with the damp odour of incense from the little church nearby and with the sharper smell of the little bunches of lavender among the linen in the old chest of drawers.

It seemed as if nothing could ever happen in that little room. The sunlight was still ; a still peace pervaded it ; and, leaning from the window, one saw that among the grey paving-stones in the courtyard beneath, the blades of grass were still, and still too were the bits of straw fallen from the manger under the shed in one corner and from the blood-red tiles together with the many small stones that had slipped down from the bank rising steeply up behind.

Inside, the little old chairs varnished black and spotlessly clean, placed on either side of the chest of drawers, all had a

little silver cross on their backs, which made them look like little nuns, quite happy to remain there well protected, sheltered, never touched by anyone ; and it seemed that they took pleasure in gazing at the priest's modest little iron bed, over whose head, on the white-washed wall, there hung a black cross with an old ivory crucifix, frail and yellow.

But above all, it was a large Christ-child made of wax who lay in a little basket padded with pale blue silk, standing on the chest of drawers, protected from the flies by a flimsy veil, also pale blue, who seemed to profit most by the silence, in that sunlight, lying with one small hand under his plump cheek, sleeping his rosy sleep among the mingled odours of incense, lavender and hot home-made bread.

Don Pietro was also sleeping, in the cane arm-chair at the foot of the bed, bald-headed and withered, leaning painfully against the back of it. But his was a very different sleep ; the open-mouthed sleep of an old man, tired and ill. His thin eyelids seemed to have lost all strength to close over the hard, burning balls of his dulled eyes. The nostrils were set in the hissing labour of his irregular breathing which betrayed the weakness of his heart.

His yellow face, hollowed and bony, had assumed while he slept an evil and repulsive expression which was false to his nature, as if, in the temporary absence of the soul, the body wished to take revenge on the spirit which for so many years had martyred it with austere will and reduced it to servility, so desperately worn out and miserable. In that horrible abandon, with that dribble of saliva running from his hanging lip, it seemed to show that it was quite exhausted. It represented his animal suffering in an almost obscene way.

Don Angelino, bursting into the little room, stopped suddenly, then went forward on tip-toe. For ten minutes he stayed watching the sleeping man in silence, but with an anxiety which gradually changed to anger with exasperation ; he clasped and unclasped his hands, driving his finger-nails right into his flesh. He wanted to shout out to waken him :

"I've decided, Don Pietro : I'm renouncing my order."

But he forced himself to restrain even his breath for fear that that holy old man, upon waking, should suddenly see him there in all his angry impatience which surely his eyes would betray, and with disgust written on his whole face. He even felt a temptation to fling out of the window that cage hanging from the shelf, so irritated was he by the scraping of the canary's little feet on the zinc bottom, in his fear that the old man should wake up.

The day before, for over four hours, he had walked up and down in that room, tossing and twisting himself about as if to keep off and thrust away the priest's gown from his small rebellious body, and moving his legs beneath it as if he wanted to kick it at every moment : he had been eagerly discussing with Don Pietro his resolution to abandon his priest's calling. It was not because he had lost his faith, no ; but because through his studies and meditation he was sincerely convinced of having acquired another, freer and more vital, on account of which he could no longer accept or suffer the dogmas, the chains and mortifications that his former faith imposed upon him. On his side the discussion had become very violent, not so much because of the answers Don Pietro had given him, as of a growing contempt for himself, for the need he had felt, absurd yet unconquerable, of going to confide in that holy old man, formerly his tutor and then his confessor for so many years ; though he knew him incapable of understanding his torments, his anxiety, his despair.

And indeed, Don Pietro had let him give vent to his feelings, every now and then closing his eyes as he listened, and permitting a gentle little smile to play on his faded lips that seemed no longer able to smile ; a kindly ironical little smile ; and murmuring indulgently, without disdain :

"Vanity . . . vanity . . ."

Another faith ? But which, since there could be only one ? More vital ? More free ? That was just wherein the vanity lay ; and he would soon find it out when that youthful impetuosity left him, when that devilish fervour was spent and the blood grew chill in his veins, when his burning young eyes

would no longer hold their present fire and when, white-haired and perhaps bald, he would no longer be so proud and handsome. In fact he had treated him as a child ; yes, a good boy who would certainly never bring about the scandal he threatened, if for no other reason than the grief, which, in so doing, he would cause his old mother who had made so many sacrifices for him.

Indeed, at the remembrance of his mother, Don Angelino again felt the tears spring to his eyes. And yet it was for her, on account of his old mother, that he had come to this resolution, in order to deceive her no longer, and for the torture it gave him to see himself worshipped by her like a little saint.

What cruelty, what a cruel sight was that old man's sleep ! The clearest demonstration of the new truths that had been revealed to him lay in the infinite misery of that exhausted body, lying in utter abandon.

But at that moment the door opened and there entered Don Pietro's old sister, small, waxen, clothed in black with a black woollen shawl over her head, more bent and more doddering than her brother. It seemed to Don Angelino that—called to him by his tears—his old mother was coming into the room, little, waxen-faced and dressed in black like this old woman. He raised his eyes to look at her, almost with dismay, without understanding at first the signs by which she asked him :

“What's he doing ? is he asleep ?”

Don Angelino nodded his head.

“And you, why are you crying ?”

But then the old man opened his misty eyes and, with his mouth still open, he raised his head from the back of the chair.

“Oh, it's you, Angelino ? What's the matter ?”

His sister went beside him, and leaning over the arm-chair, whispered a few words in his ear. Then Don Pietro stood up with difficulty, and dragging his feet he came and put his hand on Don Angelino's shoulder, and asked him :

“Would you like to do me a favour, my son ? A poor old woman who has arrived from the country is asking for me. You see that I can hardly stand on my feet. Would you go

instead of me? She's down in the sacristy. You may go down this way, by the inside stairway. Go along, you're still my good son. And God bless you!"

Don Angelino went without saying a word. Perhaps he hadn't even understood completely. By the dark, narrow spiral stairway that led to the sacristy he stopped, leaned his head on the hand which, as he descended, he drew along the wall, and started to cry like any child. Tears that burned his eyes and choked him. Tears of shame, of anger and pity together. When at last he reached the sacristy, he felt himself alienated from everything. The sacristy seemed different to him, as if he were entering it for the first time. It was cold, squalid and full of light. And finding the old woman sitting there, he almost failed to understand what she was waiting for there. She seemed almost unreal to him.

She was a decrepit peasant woman, badly dressed and dirty from her eyelids, horribly upturned. Mumbling, she repeatedly raised her sharp chin till it almost touched her nose. In one hand she held two fowls by their legs, and upon the palm of the other she showed three silver lire, saved since goodness knows how long. On the ground, in front of her feet, which were encased in two enormous worn-out men's boots, she had a dirty knapsack full of dried almonds and nuts.

Don Angelino gazed upon her in disgust.

"What do you want?"

The old woman, forcing herself to look at him, mumbled something, her tongue stumbling between her flaccid, hollow cheeks, between her toothless gums.

"What did you say?" I don't hear. . . . You're Mother Croce?" Yes, Mother Croce. She was Mother Croce, and Don Pietro knew her well. Mother Croce Sioma; whose husband had died so many years ago, drowned in the Naro river. She had come on foot, with that knapsack on her back, from the plains of the Cannatello. More than seven miles of road. And with that offering of two fowls and the knapsack of almonds and nuts and with the three lire for a Mass she wanted (Don Pietro knew very well) to placate San Calogero,

the saint of all mercies, who had cured her son of a mortal disease. Hardly was he cured, however, when that son had gone to America. He had promised her that he would write from there and would send her enough to live on every month. Sixteen months had passed ; she had no news of him ; she did not even know if he were dead or alive. Even if she knew him to be living, she could have borne it patiently if he sent her nothing. Not even a line of writing ! Nothing. . . . But this was because she, as soon as her son was cured, had not fulfilled her vow to San Calogero. And that was certainly the reason : she realised it herself. However, she had not been able to fulfil her vow (as Don Pietro knew) because she was bereft of all she had by her son's illness, and she had barely her eyes left to weep with : to weep tears of blood ! Yes, blood ! Then, when her son went away, old as she was and helpless, how could she find enough to make the offering and to save the three lire for a Mass, if she only earned barely enough every day to keep alive. She had needed sixteen months to do so, and with what pains God alone knew ! But now, here they were, the two fowls, and here the three lire and the almonds and the nuts. Merciful Saint Calogero would be pleased, and soon, without doubt, the news would come to her from America that her son was well and prosperous.

While the old woman spoke thus, Don Angelino walked up and down the sacristy, shooting fierce glances here and there, opening and closing his hands, because he was tempted to seize her by the shoulders and shake her furiously, shouting in her face :

“Is that your faith ?”

But no. Others, others, not that poor old woman ; he would like to seize other people by their shoulders and shake them, his fellow priests, for instance, who kept so many poor people in that abjection of faith, and traded upon that abjection. Oh God ! how could they accept for a Mass that old woman's three lire, the fowls, the almonds and nuts ?

“Take back that knapsack and go away !” he shouted to her, trembling all over.

She looked at him stupefied.

"You can go away, I tell you !" added Don Angelino, becoming more enraged, "Saint Calogero has no need of fowls nor of dried figs ! If your son has any reason to write, be sure that he will do so. As for the Mass, I tell you that Don Pietro is ill. Go away ! Go away !"

As if stunned by those violent words, the old woman asked him :

"But what are you saying ? Don't you understand that this is a vow ? It is a vow !"

And in that word, though firmly spoken, there was such amazement at his incomprehension, almost incredible, that Don Angelino was forced to pay attention to it. He remembered that he was there instead of Don Pietro and checked his anger. With gentler words he tried to persuade the old woman to take back her fowls, her almonds and nuts, and told her that as for the Mass, if she really wished it, why he would say it for her himself, instead of Don Pietro, but on condition that she kept her three lire.

She turned to look at him, almost terrified, and repeated :

"But why ! What do you mean ? What good would it be then ? If it is a vow ! If I don't give what I promised, what good is the vow ? I beg your pardon, who am I speaking to ? Perhaps I'm not speaking to a priest ? Then why do you treat me like this ? Or perhaps you believe that I'm not giving with all my heart to miraculous Saint Calogero that which I promised him ? Oh God ! Oh God ! Perhaps it's because I told you of all the trouble I had getting it all."

And thus speaking, she started to weep desperately, with those horrible bloodshot eyes.

Deeply filled with remorse by her weeping, Don Angelino repented of his harshness, suddenly overcome with a respect that covered him with shame, respect for that old woman who was weeping before him for her offended faith. He went up to her, comforted her, told her that he hadn't thought at all what she suspected, and that she was to leave everything there ; even the three lire, yes : and meanwhile she was to go into the church, so that he could say a Mass for her straight away.

He called the sacristan and ran to the dressing-room, and while the latter helped him to get ready, he thought he would find a way to give back to the old woman, after the Mass, her three lire, the fowls and the other offerings in the knapsack. But then, in order that this charity might be rendered acceptable to that poor old woman, did it not require something which he felt he did not possess? What charity would the price of a Mass be, if he did not celebrate that Mass with the most sincere and ardent fervour, for all the labour and sacrifice which she had endured to fulfil the vow? An unworthy pretence, for an alms of three lire?

And Don Angelino, already dressed, with the chalice in his hand, paused for a moment, uncertain and oppressed with agony of mind, upon the threshold of the sacristy, looking into the empty little church; wondering whether he were worthy, without faith as he was, to go up to the altar.

Then he saw the old woman prostrated before that altar, with her forehead on the ground, and he felt his breast rise with a breath that was not his own, and it seemed as if his back was split by a sharp thrill. Oh why had he imagined till now that faith was lovely and radiant as a sun? There it was, there before him, in the misery of that kneeling grief, in the squalid narrowness of that prostrate fear; faith!

And Don Angelino went up to the altar as if pushed from behind, exalted by so great a charity, and his hands trembled and his whole soul trembled, as when for the first time he had approached it.

And for that faith he prayed, his eyes closed, entering into the very soul of that old woman as into a dark and narrow temple, where her faith burned; he prayed to the God of that temple, whatever it was, whatever it might be; sole good, however, sole comfort for that misery.

And when the Mass was finished, he kept the offering and the three lire, so as not to lessen by a small charity the great charity of that faith.

(From the 5th volume of "Novelle per un Anno."
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(IV)

BY THE BEDSIDE

(Translated by Miss GRACE GILL-MARK)

I

IN the darkness of the staircase, hardly relieved by the faint flicker from the corridor where he had left the candle burning, Marco Mauri threw the question at a man who was hurrying up the stairs :

"Is it the doctor ? Quick, she's dying !"

The man paused a second, endeavouring to make out who had sprung the question and announcement on him.

". . . Dying ?"

Mauri, panting in his anguish and gesticulating, incapable of replying turned round and bounded up the stairs again. Picking up the candle he crossed the passage and darted ahead of the other through the door at the end.

"This way," he said, "in the next room !"

The newcomer followed him anxiously, warily, as if his first care was to discover what sort of place he had come to, from the objects that loomed out of the darkness in the quavering light of the candle which the other was carrying. On the threshold of the second room he stopped, out of breath.

He was a man of about fifty, tall and unkempt looking ; he wore gold-rimmed spectacles ; he was clean-shaven and his head was almost bald on the top, but strands of fair hair fell untidily over his forehead and temples. He flung them back, and for a moment kept his hands pressed to his head.

Lying on the tossed bed in the disordered, dimly lit room, was a woman. Deathly pale, her face already horribly drawn down either side of the nose, she kept her eyes shut ; and her hair, a very beautiful auburn colour, was loosely scattered over the pillow. She seemed to be already sunk in death ;

only her head was still almost imperceptibly shaken by continual spasms, soundless and unconscious.

A little old priest without his cassock, dark complexioned, wearing knee breeches, long stockings and silver-buckled shoes, broke off the prayer he was mumbling absent-mindedly by the bedside and rose from his seat in faltering anxiety. Mauri, meanwhile, was whispering distractedly through his tears :

"It's here, look, here : here's the wound ! (pressing his forefinger on the base of the abdomen.) Just here. The blow must have missed its mark, the hand was unskilled. Do you hear how she's moaning ? She has been doing it ever since this morning—do you know why ? because they didn't operate on her while there was time, they refused to ! See for yourself, do something for her, quickly ! . . ."

He was surprised when the man whom he took for the doctor, and who was standing there at the foot of the bed with staring eyes fixed on the dying woman, suddenly turned and looked at him.

"She can't hear anything, you know," he added with a gesture of despair.

But the other turned to the priest who had approached him in nervous perplexity.

"Don Camillo Righi ?" he enquired.

"The same, at your service ! And you—pardon me, but you are Dr. Silvio Gelli, I think ?"

"Ah ! the husband ?" said Mauri with a sneer.

"Kindly be quiet !" snapped the old priest. Then he drew the other by the arm into the next room, exclaiming : "Come out of here, out of the bedroom !"

"No, wait a minute, please, I should like to know—" the other began, eyeing the priest with cold disapproval ; but he broke off at the sudden sight of something emerging from a dark corner. It was a freak, a pitiable little hunchback less than three feet tall, with a yellow, contorted face in which, however, two dark eyes shone brilliantly, full of fear.

"Go in there, Margherita," said the priest, pointing to the

bedroom. "My sister," he added to Gelli with a pathetic look.

But Gelli only went on, in a hard voice :

"You wrote me that she was dying—"

"—Repentant, oh yes, you may be sure, Professor," Righi hastily assured him. "Yes, she has really repented. Why, it was her own idea, poor soul, to ask your forgiveness, through me."

"And who may that man be," asked Gelli with contempt.

"Well, the fact is, he—he turned up, where from I don't know, —"

"—Perugia, I told you, Perugia," interrupted Mauri, settling himself on a settee by the table on which the candle was burning.

Righi, more and more embarrassed, went on :

"On the evening of the very day that the lady arrived. In fact, I thought at first, so did the women, that he must be a relation. Didn't we, Margherita?"

The dwarf who was standing, scared, near the door, nodded several times gazing at Gelli with an unconscious smile on her lips.

"And then," went on Righi, "when the lady, *afterwards*, asked to confess to me, I learnt that he—that man there—was molesting her!"

Mauri gave another sneering laugh and shook his head.

"Oh well, I can't make it out!" exclaimed the priest. "But anyway, believe me it has been impossible to get rid of him."

"I am not going!" Mauri rejoined, his eyes fixed on the ground. Silvio Gelli watched him a moment, then enquired of Righi :

"This is your house, isn't it?"

"Hotel!" Mauri forestalled the priest's answer, without raising his eyes.

"Certainly not, sir!" Righi contradicted angrily. "Where did you get that from? Have you seen it written up anywhere? If anything, it is a boarding house, but only in summer. It is out of the season now, and this is my own private house, purely and simply; and I ask just whom I

please to come into it, and no one else. So once more I repeat : will you please go away ? How many more times ? I really can't think why I have put up with your extraordinary behaviour ! You have no business here now the Professor has come. Kindly bestir yourself."

"No, I am not going," repeated Mauri, still seated, and gazing at the priest with crazed eyes.

"And what if *I* make you ?" exclaimed Gelli at this point, going up and planting himself in front of him.

"No, sir, no ! Insult me, strike me, but let me stay !" Mauri burst out, with appalling anguish in his voice. "What does it matter to you ? How can you take offence at me any longer ? I'll stay here, in this room. Oh, in the name of charity ! let me stay and weep. You can't weep for her, sir ; let me. For don't imagine it is forgiveness she needs, poor sufferer : she wants tears, only tears ! What *you* ought to have done, if I may say so, was to kill the dog who took her from you and then had the heart to desert her, instead of trying to turn me out, I who took her in, adored her, and ruined my own life for her sake. For her sake I, Marco Mauri, left my family, my wife, my children !"

So saying he rose to his feet, his eyes starting and his arms uplifted, and added :

"As if you could possibly send me away !"

Silvio Gelli, so dazed that it was impossible to tell whether he was feeling more indignation or pity, more anger or shame, stood staring at this middle-aged man in the clutches of a frenzied grief. He saw great tears running down the drawn cheeks and trickling into the unkempt black beard, touched here and there with grey, forked at the chin.

A moan of pain came from the bedroom.

Mauri made an instinctive movement towards it but Gelli stopped him with the admonition :

"You are not to go in !"

"All right" ; Mauri checked himself, swallowing down his tears—"You go ; you've a right to. Find out quickly if there is anything to be done. You are a great doctor, I know.

But no, she had much better die, after all. Let her die, do you hear ? because if—if you have come to forgive her, I . . .”

He buried his face in his hands as his sobs burst out afresh, and flung himself in a heap on the settee, in the savage misery that devoured him.

Don Camillo Righi touched Gelli very tentatively on the arm and pointed towards the room where the dying woman was perhaps by now roused from her lethargy.

“No, thank you !” said Gelli with a forced smile twitching his lips. “You must surely understand, I was hardly expecting—”

“Of course, of course ; but you must make excuses : the man’s quite mad,” Righi explained bluntly.

“Mad—” echoed Mauri, “Yes, mad with despair, probably—mad with remorse ! But why didn’t you tell him when you wrote, Father, that Flora killed herself because of me ?”

“Flora ?” Gelli asked involuntarily.

“Fulvia, oh yes I know !” Mauri corrected hastily. “But she called herself Flora, afterwards. You don’t know ; but I know everything : all about her life, then and before then ; all ! and I know what brings you here, too.”

“Oh you do, do you ?” Gelli exclaimed. “Personally, I am beginning to wonder why on earth I have come.”

“I’ll tell you,” rejoined Mauri. “See here : Whether she lives or dies I am on the edge of a precipice. So I can say what I like without considering anything or anyone.”

“Really, Professor, don’t you think—” began Righi once more, on tenter-hooks.

“No, no. Let him speak,” Gelli answered.

“We are in the presence of death,” cried Mauri ; “jealousy no longer exists. In any case you have no cause to object to me. When I first met Flora she was on the streets. The priest was wrong not to tell you that it was for my sake she killed herself.”

“Excuse me !” protested Righi in renewed agitation ; “I have done what my sacred office required, and nothing more !”

"Humbug !" retorted Mauri with contempt. "You are not seriously trying to act your farce of the pardoned penitent, at this stage ? All right, then. Go in to her, you, sir ; go and grant your forgiveness, and then go back where you came from, away in Como, to that charming little country house at Cavallasca, with the gratification of having done justice to yourself, the comfortable assurance of your own generosity ! Do you suppose this is the time and place for play acting ? Tell the priest here, frankly, what made you come. Remorse, Father, remorse ! Considering it was he himself who drove his miserable wife to despair, many years ago ! Can you deny it ? Then say so, and have done with it. In there lies a woman at death's door, murdered. It's time to stop shamming. Oh, you are a highly respected gentleman, now, the well-known scientist—oh yes ! You kept your daughter with you !"

"I absolutely forbid you—" broke in Gelli, quivering all over and controlling himself with an effort.

"Well, well," Mauri continued mildly. "I only say that it was in the power of that innocent child to save her, wasn't it ? Think : that woman would not be where she is now if you had not kept her daughter to yourself."

"You have abandoned your own children, and you dare to talk like this to me ?"

"I do, sir ! And I blame myself as well. I am here under the burden of a double crime, in fact. For I deceived her, I deceived her myself. Yes ; I told her I was unmarried, all alone in the world. I told her the truth, in my own way ; it was truth for me. But my wife went and found her, there in Perugia, and—Heaven knows what she said to her ! I don't know, I only know that Flora, in the illusion that she would be restoring a family to peace, came here to put herself out of the way. . . . And now, how can you expect me to leave her ? She, the martyr, has forgiven me. But her forgiveness is not enough, for me. I must stay here and weep as long as she is alive, and after—after, I don't know ! Listen—listen a minute, will you ? Tear off the mask, you who have come to pardon ; throw yourself on your knees by her bedside and ask

pardon for yourself instead. Tell that unhappy woman she is a saint, a victim to us all ; tell her that men are vile. Oh, they are never dishonoured, men ! not unless they steal money : they can steal a woman's honour, that's nothing, it is something to boast of. Look, this is what we ought to do, we men—”

He suddenly fell on his knees in front of the terrified dwarf, took her by the arms, and cried out :

“Spit at me ! spit at me ! Spit in my face !”

His cry brought two women on the scene, roused out of their sleep and half undressed : Mrs. Naccheri, Righi's sister-in-law, a widow, and her daughter Guiditta with a babe in her arms.

Gelli and the priest had remained motionless, stunned by the crazed man's violence.

Mrs. Naccheri hastened to the assistance of the poor dwarf, who was trembling all over, nearly fainting.

“It's all right, Margherita, run away. Good gracious, what an exhibition ! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sir ! We've had quite enough of you ; get up, please, get up !”

Mauri, still on his knees with his face to the ground, was sobbing. All at once he leapt to his feet, crying :

“No, I'm not a civilised member of society any longer, am I ? There's not a shred of respectability left on me, is there ? Heaven help us, how upsetting for this eminent professor who has come to pardon, and for our reverend gentleman here who lets rooms ! And yourself, Madam ? Oh look, tut tut ! Where is that wig of flaxen curls ? Left behind on the dressing table ? Humbugs, all of you ! I make my bow ! My respects to you, humbugs !” And furiously bowing, with a sneering laugh Mauri escaped from the room.

“The man's going out of his senses,” said Gelli, astounded.

“He has gone clean off his head long ago, if you ask me,” remarked Mrs. Naccheri.

“Brute !” supplemented her daughter.

Don Camillo Righi, who had taken longer than the others to recover from the shock (he may have been thinking that the

madman might have flung at him worse accusations than he did), roused himself to introduce to his dear sister-in-law and niece Professor Gelli, who had so admirably responded to his proposal to come and grant forgiveness in person.

"Such goodness ! We hope it may be rewarded—"

The two women were trying to apologise to him for what had occurred, as well as for their night apparel, when behold Mauri back once more, in high excitement, pushing in front of him a bald and bearded little tub of a man much annoyed at being thus unceremoniously hustled.

"Here is Doctor Balla !"

"You be off, at once ! off with you !" ordered Gelli, seizing Mauri by the lapel of his coat and shaking him as he pushed him towards the passage door. "Yes, yes, all right !" said Mauri, falling back unresistingly. "Only let me just say a word to the Doctor. Doctor, listen !—for Heaven's sake, save her yourself : don't let him be the one to save her, else she will be lost to me !—Yes, I'm going, I'm going of my own accord—don't worry ! Don't forget, Doc——"

Gelli gave him a final shove and shut the door on him.

"That's the way, splendid, splendid !" cried Righi, vastly relieved.

"But is there any need for the downstairs door to be left open ?" Mrs. Naccheri asked her brother-in-law sharply. "Margherita, go and tell them to shut it at once !"

The dwarf obeyed, and as she passed through their midst they all watched the way she moved her crooked legs, as though they had nothing else to do for the moment.

Doctor Balla puffed out his cheeks ; then looking round resentfully at all their perturbed faces he announced :

"I have just been to Montepulciano."

"Oh, you have ! Well ?" enquired Righi.

"Well ? Well nothing ! a wasted drive, that's all. I saw my colleague Cardelli—referred the case to him—but he considers—well, yes, that it would be useless for him to come now."

"We have with us," said Righi, "the lady's husband—Doctor Gelli—one of our leading lights."

"Indeed?" exclaimed Balla. "Delighted!"

With the loquacious ill-humour of a man aggrieved at his lot, who being convinced that fate has conspired against him, has all the items of her ill-treatment clearly tabulated in his mind and brings them out on every occasion with the same words and the same expression, as if proud of his own cleverness in thus tabulating and describing them, he went up to Gelli and expounded at length on the disgraceful conditions of his work in the small Tuscan town where he practised. Of course there was a hospital of sorts, and pretty decently equipped—oh yes; but only two doctors, the other one, Nardoni, specialised in surgery and he himself in medicine. His colleague had been ill now for several days.

"Ill, ill," he reiterated as though Nardoni had done it on purpose to give him trouble. Then he suddenly rounded up with: "Excuse me, but have you been to see your wife yet?"

Gelli shook his head.

"You have not? How's that? Oh—of course!"

And Balla gave an annoyed look at Righi; whose embarrassment was apparent, and still more so that of the two ladies.

"Well, what are we going to do?" he asked after a while.

"It is nearly one o'clock, may I remind you?"

Gelli led the way into the bedroom; the others followed.

II

The dying woman had opened her eyes; the blue of them, languorous and infinitely sad, was deep sunk in encircling shadows. At the sight of her husband she made a frightened movement as if to huddle under the bedclothes. Two tears welled up in her eyes, and lacking the strength to trickle down her cheeks, crystallised her look of dismay.

With a nervous, involuntary smile that betrayed the desperate effort he was making to control the ferment of conflicting emotions: hate, nausea, pity, anger, resentment, Silvio Gelli bent over her.

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Doctor Balla closed the door, then approached the bed to uncover the prostrate form. But she held up the coverlet with one hand, turning her startled look on her husband.

"You?" she breathed.

"What does she mean?" asked Balla in surprise and turned to Gelli.

He saw his face contracted as if by a sudden spasm.

"Would you rather not?" Gelli asked her, bending down again. "Mustn't I?—Of course, I did not come here as a doctor, I know—so perhaps——"

He drew himself up, glanced at the doctor and added :

"I should be assuming a tremendous responsibility."

"Three days and a night, already," said Balla, putting his own interpretation on the cause of the husband's perplexity. "And the process of inflammation has gone a long way, obviously. If we attempted it now, you mean?—Yes, a great responsibility, as you say. On the other hand——"

"Yes, on the other hand—we shall have to try," concluded Gelli.

"Well then, Madam, you will allow me—?" said Balla, gently drawing back the bedclothes.

She closed her eyes again with a painful frown.

Balla set about unbandaging the wound.

In the silence, the motionless objects in the room, the curtains, the candle on the chest of drawers with its reflection in the mirror, seemed to Gelli to become imbued with sensitiveness, to be waiting in an anguish of suspense.

Struck by the vividness of this momentary impression, he let his thoughts wander, looking round the room as if to acquaint himself with the objects thus standing witness, in that far-off, unfamiliar place, of this sudden, tragic event in his life. When Balla's voice, saying "Look!" brought him back to earth, he turned his eyes at once to the uncovered wound, as calm and concentrated as if he had been called in for a consultation. He made a long and close examination of the wound. Perhaps if laparotomy had been tried early enough there would have been some hope of recovery. As it was, after four days—

Silvio Gelli raised himself up, and shot a keen glance at Balla. The doctor gave a shrug, and for the sake of saying something he pointed out certain external symptoms round the wound and proffered some quite superfluous explanations.

Gelli bent down again to examine ; then he looked at his wife, paying no heed to the doctor's question : "Shall we do it up again ?"

When the bandage and bedclothes had been replaced, Fulvia half opened her eyes, looked at her husband, and asked in the faintest of voices :

"Am I going to die ?"

"No," he answered, laying a hand on her forehead. "Don't worry, don't worry. To-morrow then, doctor. I will see to it. Make all the preparations, please."

Balla looked at him puzzled, wondering whether the decision and the order were to be interpreted as a merciful attempt to deceive.

"The instruments from the hospital ?" he asked.

"Yes," replied Gelli. "Everything."

"And—er—had I better send our nurse as well ?" Balla went on, trying to catch his eye and show he had understood. "She is the right arm of my colleague Nardoni."

"Nardoni ? No, he will not be needed."

"No, I said the nurse, Aurelia. She has been with us at our little hospital there for close on thirteen years."

"Ah, really ?" sighed Gelli, still absent-minded.

"Thirteen years ? Actually thirteen years—is it, Fulvia ? Thirteen years——"

"Since when, do you mean ?" Balla intervened.

He was at a loss to understand. He stayed a little longer, then, tired of waiting, went off with a shrug of the shoulders.

Silvio Gelli sat down beside the bed. The dying woman tried to turn her head towards him but her hair impeded her. He put out a hand and smoothed it back ; the gesture brought a rush of feeling to him and he sighed :

"Poor Fulvia !"

Yes, her hair was the same as ever ; but oh ! how wan and

peaked it made her altered face look, now ; and what a furrow now lined the brow that had been so lofty ! Thirteen years ! A gulf !

She made an effort to put her hand outside the bedclothes, and repeated, more with her eyes than her lips : "Thank you."

He took the hand and held it pressed between his own.

But it was not the touch of hands for which each was waiting at that moment ; first their eyes must reach understanding and as yet they were unable to ; for not his look only but his whole appearance seemed to Fulvia strange and baffling. His eyes were trying to reassure hers, to hold the glance that was eluding him as if in doubt and bewilderment, and aloud he added :

"Yes, Fulvia—for all that you suffered with me—and have since suffered through my fault, up to now—and for which this desperate act of yours is proof—I—I——"

He broke off, and turned his head to the door which Balla had left open. There might be someone behind it who could hear ; he thought of the madman who had dared, in the frenzy of his passion, to blurt out the truth in front of everyone, and thought he could see through the motive that had driven him to the bedside of his dying wife. And now he was using almost the same words that man had used. But no, it was not true ; it was not remorse alone that had brought him here ; it was also, or rather it was in the first place, a certain queer need he had felt. He must tell her——

"Wait." He let go her hand and went to shut the door.

"Do you know, Fulvia, I too went through a very bad time I can't explain what it was—something I should never have thought possible. At once, from the very first day. Everything became clear—but at the same time incomprehensible to me. That's a fact. That cynical bestiality of mine, that had no reason, no purpose, or rather, one purpose only : to show you that I was all-powerful and you were powerless against me. It was—what was the meaning of it ? I certainly got no pleasure out of it ! But it was a kind of challenge. By dint of

hitting—but with the gloves on, you remember?—I drove you almost to the brink of the precipice and there left you, in danger, unprotected and helpless, waiting to be overcome by giddiness. And you, proud as you were, accepted the challenge at last, in desperation, gave yourself up to the giddiness and went down into the abyss! Oh the emptiness after you had gone! There was I with our forsaken little girl—and I was useless, not good enough—I tried by every means, from that time onwards, to fill the void within and around me, by looking after the child, by my studies—but all in vain! It grew deeper and deeper inside me, wider and blacker all round. I have even courted sorrow, deliberately, so as to give myself some feeling of stability in that void. But it is no good: I feel no sorrow—neither for you nor for myself, only for life being what it is. Here are you, committing suicide, someone else going out of his senses, others who reason and reason and never get anywhere. I come here: ‘she is dying,’ I say, ‘and desires to depart in peace; go to her, quickly, quickly!’—And my feelings are dashed against a reality I had never dreamed of. No, it is not my place to forgive, but to be forgiven. . . . Will you forgive me?”

He took his hands from his head. He had been talking as if to himself; now he turned towards the bed. She had fallen into a doze again, her eyebrows slightly lifted as if what she had heard had shocked her; and she seemed to be still shaken internally by sobs as she lay mute and stiff with her head towards him.

He gazed on her for a while, with a kind of fear. The drawn cheeks seemed to have relaxed a little. And for an instant he clearly saw again in that face the image he had preserved so many years. She was beautiful, she was beautiful still! Who knew to what depths she had fallen? But the nobility of the features had remained intact: as if pitch had not been able to defile her. And now, perhaps, death—

He rose very quietly so as not to disturb her and tip-toed into the next room where the dwarf was waiting alone.

“She is asleep,” he told her in a whisper as he looked at her

wonderingly, disturbed by the mystery that in the silence of that dreadful night seemed embodied in that creature whose existence was like a ghastly joke of Nature.

Again she smiled her unconscious smile, and said :

"I will go in."

III

Gelli sat down on the chair from which she had risen, close by the table where the candle was burning.

A moment later he gave a start. The door leading into the corridor seemed to be opening of itself, very slowly, in the silence.

Marco Mauri put his head through, with a finger laid cautiously on his lips ; then he came into the room, whispering :

"I have been hiding in the passage close by, in the dark—Sh-sh—Now we are alone, just the two of us without a sound, without breathing, I can stay in here, you need not mind : nobody can see us. Just the two of us in here, quiet as mice, eh ?"

Gelli looked at him in vexed astonishment ; then, at an imploring gesture of the man's outstretched hands, he gave an involuntary, nervous smile, shrugged his shoulders, and pointed to the couch nearby. Mauri sat down, contentedly.

For a long while they both remained silent. Then Mauri said :

"If you would like to stretch out here and rest a bit—? But I don't suppose you will ? Nor I. The animal in us wants to sleep, the spirit won't allow it. When one of my little boys died, years ago, after I had been staying up with him for nine nights on end without a break, I felt no grief at all for the moment. I was too tired, and had to sleep first ; afterwards, when I woke, sorrow descended on me. But there was nothing on my conscience then. Now, I haven't closed an eye for the last four nights, and I don't feel sleepy !" He paused a

moment, lost in his thoughts. Then, with his gaze on the candle flame he said :

"What was it the ancients called that river? Oh yes, Lethe—Lethe, the river of oblivion. It is in the public houses it runs nowadays, the river Lethe. And I do not drink ! Four days, do you realise? without anything, not so much as a crust. Nothing but water from the fountain down there in the market place, like the cattle. Stale, gritty water—ugh ! But nothing is any good to me—a few drops of prussic acid is what I want. My eyes—do you know what they feel like? These two arches over them, like the two arches of those little bridges that span the sand and pebbles of a dry, scorched river-bed alive with crickets—I've got two of them, the cursed things, one in each ear : chirping and chirping till they drive me mad—I'm a good talker, am I not? It reminds me of when I was in the country training for oratory with a view to becoming a public prosecutor ; I would cram up the subject matter, then start improvising out loud, to the trees : Gentlemen of the Court, Gentlemen of the Jury—talk, talk—you must excuse me, I simply can't help myself, I have a raging here inside me—oh I could scream and scream !"

Whereupon he stretched himself face downwards on the couch, his chin on his arm, his eyes wide and staring.

Gelli looked at him, and seized with a vague fear, got up and went to the bedroom door. He looked in, then remained standing on the threshold.

Mauri sat up again and asked anxiously :

"Is she resting?"

Gelli nodded.

"Tell me—is there really no more hope? Absolutely none? If she is sleeping, you know.—Will you let me have a glimpse of her? From where you are, just for a minute. May I?"

He jumped up and went to the spot, with bated breath ; raising himself on tiptoe he looked into the room.

The dwarf, who was seated by the bedside, caught sight of the two heads side by side, looking at the dying woman. Gelli, intercepting her stare of amazement, pushed Mauri away.

"Sit down—go and sit down."

"Yes, yes.—Thank you," said Mauri, doing as he was told.

"Ah yes, she is dying—dying—dying——"

His eyes grew red and the tears streamed afresh down his cheeks while he struggled to control the sobs that were choking him. He went on weeping for a time, then he flung out his arms, with a shrug of the shoulders, and tried to speak, but at the sound of his voice still muffled with weeping he dug his teeth into his hand. He blinked hard, violently forcing back the tears.

At last he said : "We will stay here, both together, very good and quiet, and watch by her till the last.—Afterwards, we will go with her to the grave, then part and go our own way home. *You* will, at least : you have a house, a treasure—your daughter, who knows nothing of all this—happy innocent ! But my children know all. Their mother, acting on some instinct of cruelty, told them everything. What was the need ? she doesn't love me, she never has ; in fact, I am only in her way. She brought them up herself, there in the country, after her own fashion ; and they have never felt the least respect or consideration for me. They call me 'the Magistrate,' or rather 'the Mag.,' as their mother does ; imagine it !—'Is the Mag. in ?—No, the Mag. is at the Courts.'—Oh, you have no idea, Professor, what it means to be stuck down at the age of twenty-five in an out-of-the-way place and fossilise there for four, five, ten eternal years—a magistrate ! Shall I tell you that I married in order to have a piano in the house ? For I have learnt something about music, nothing about law. And I married a woman older than myself who owned houses and land—and who—But there, we turn into mere brutes, you know ! After being swamped for four or five years in all the wretched pettiness and baseness of humanity there is not a single shred left on us of any of the pretty fictions society disguised us with, and then it is we discover that man is a swine by right of nature. You can't get away from that. We have denied ourselves this natural right because society has sent us to school at an early age and taught us manners, to

add to our troubles and not let us get too fat. But what difference does it make? You have only to see men in their natural surroundings, as I have seen them for years in that country place. What sort of individuals are we, you and I? There are you, pitying me, and there am I, admiring you—Oh, very fine!”

He laughed and gave a long tug to each point of his beard in turn. Finally he clutched them both together and remained plunged in thought, his eyes bright, excited, full of unspoken words.

Gelli watched him a while, then asked in a heavy voice :

“Where did you meet her?”

“I? Fulvia? at Perugia,” Mauri hastily roused himself to reply. “Not quite a month after I was sent there, in a magistrate’s office, one of my colleagues.”

“Had she been taken up?”

“No, she had come to give evidence. She had not been at Perugia herself much more than a month.”

“Alone? or what?”

“In bad company. With a man—wait—oh yes, Gamba was his name, a man who gave himself out as an artist, a painter; in reality he was an insignificant mosaic worker of the—the Murano works, I believe, sent to restore a mosaic in some church or other at Perugia. Well . . . he was a blackguard, got drunk every blessed day, and—and he used to strike her. One night he was found dead in the street with his head cut open . . .

Gelli covered his face with his hands.

“Disgusting, isn’t it?” Mauri burst out, springing to his feet. “*To what depths she had fallen*—eh? Oh, disgusting! Come, enough of shamming. Everything depends on the first time we strip off before the eyes of all the garment society has foisted on us. You try stealing five lire, just once, and manage to be caught in the act. You’ll soon see! But you don’t steal, do you? Oh no! And do you suppose that poor woman would have done what she did if you, her husband—oh, be honest for once!—And yet, Flora never said anything against

you, nor against anyone ; not even that dirty dog who left her there and then, with no warning, for no shadow of reason. She even made excuses for him, said she had oppressed him with her constant fears and jealousy. She exonerated you, as well, and laid the blame for all she had endured on women : she had a profound hatred for all women, in herself. And a few days ago, when I came here to join her, she tried to make allowances for me too, for the way I had deceived her, lied to her, and blamed a certain involuntary flirtatiousness in herself—"the evil instinct," as she called it—in other words, the need all women feel to attract men, be it even their own sister's husband."

He went on and on in the same bitter strain. Gelli had rested his arms on the table and buried his face in them. Was he asleep ? Suddenly the frightened face of Margherita, the dwarf, appeared in the doorway. Mauri signed to her not to speak.

"Dead ?" he breathed.

She nodded several times, and Mauri ran on tiptoe into the bedroom ; but at sight of the lifeless woman he burst into violent sobbing and flung himself on her frantically.

The dwarf approached the sleeping man to rouse him ; but Silvio Gelli lifted his head from his arms and said with a frown, his eyes closed :

"I am not asleep. Leave him to weep now. . . Leave him alone. . ."

(From the 6th volume of "Novelle per un Anno."
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(V)

CLOSE FRIENDS

(Translated by Miss JOAN M. WILSON)

G I G I M E A R muffled up in an old Inverness cape that morning (when one is over forty a north wind's no joke), his neckerchief turned up to his nose, his hands in a pair of thick

English gloves, his person well fed, smooth, and ruddy, was waiting on the Lungo Tevere de' Mellini for the tram which would drop him, as it did each day, in Via Pastrengo in front of the *Corte dei Conti* where he was employed.

A Count by birth but now alas ! only too well without either county or the wherewithal to count, Gigi Mear had, in the blissful unconsciousness of childhood, made known to his father the noble plan of entering this office of the State believing then, in his innocence, that the *Corte dei Conti* was a Court for Counts, to which every count had right of entrance.

Now everyone knows that trams never by any chance come when you are waiting for them. Rather they stop half-way because the current has been cut off, or they choose to run over a cart or even crush some unfortunate man. They are a wonderful asset, nevertheless, all things taken into consideration. The morning in question, there was a north wind blowing, icy and keen, and Gigi Mear stamped his feet as he watched the grey river, which looked as though it, too, poor thing, felt very cold, there in its shirt sleeves, so to speak, between the colourless walls of the new embankment.

At last din-dinning up came the tram, and Gigi Mear was getting ready to jump on without it stopping when from the new bridge, the Ponte Cavour, he heard someone shout his name after him :

“Gigi, old man ! Gigi !”

And he saw a gentleman running after him and gesticulating with arms flying like a telegraph post. The tram slipped away. In return Gigi Mear had the consolation of finding himself in the arms of a stranger who, to judge by the violence with which he embraced Gigi, twice, full on the silk handkerchief which covered his mouth, was an intimate friend.

“Do you know, I knew you at once Gigi, old man ! At once ! But what is this I see ?—Getting old already ? All these white hairs ; aren't you ashamed ? Give us a kiss, Gigione, my dear old fellow, for your sainted old age. You stood there looking just as though you were waiting for me. When I saw you put up your arm to get on that demon of a tram I said to myself, ‘That's treachery, sheer treachery.’”

"Yes," said Mear, with a forced smile, "I was going to the office."

"Do me the favour not to mention such disgusting things just now."

"What?"

"I mean it. In fact, I insist."

"You're a queer johnny, do you know?"

"Yes, I know I am. But tell me, you weren't expecting to see me, now were you? I see you weren't, judging from your face."

"Well, no . . . to tell the truth—"

"I arrived yesterday evening. Your brother sends his greetings. He, by the way—I can see I shall make you laugh—wanted to give me a letter of introduction to you! . . . 'What,' I said, 'A letter of introduction to Gigione? Do you know, I knew him before you did, so to speak. Friends from boyhood, bless my soul. We've come to blows many a time. Fellow students at the University together.' Famous old Padua, Gigione, do you remember? That huge bell that you never heard: you slept like a—what shall we say?—a dormouse, eh? I think I ought to say like a pig, though. Well. . . Then when you *did* hear it—which was only once—you thought it was the fire-alarm. . . . Good old times, those were! . . . Your brother's very well, thank God. We've embarked together on a certain little affair, and I'm here for that. But whatever's up with you? You look like a funeral. Are you married?"

"No, my dear!" exclaimed Gigi Mear, with energy.

"Going to bè?"

"Are you mad? After forty? Good heavens, no. Wouldn't dream of it."

"Forty! It's more likely turned fifty, Gigione. But why not? Still, I was forgetting . . . it's a peculiarity of yours never to hear anything go—bells or years. Fifty, my dear man, fifty, I assure you, and well turned, too. We may well sigh. The business begins to be a bit serious. You were born—let's see . . . in the April of 1851, is that so or is it not? April the twelfth."

"Pardon me, May ; and pardon me, eighteen-hundred-and-fifty-two," Mear corrected him, dwelling on each syllable somewhat irritated. "Must you know better than I do ? The twelfth of May, 1852. And therefore 49 years and a few months up to present day."

"And no wife ! That's fine ! I have, you know. Ah, yes, a tragedy. I'll make you burst your sides with laughing. In the meantime, of course, we'll take it that you've invited me to lunch. Where do you feed these days ? Still at the old *Barba* ?"

"My conscience !" exclaimed Gigi Mear, with growing astonishment. "D'you know even about the *Barba* ? You've been there, too, I suppose."

"I at the *Barba* ? How could I have been, when I'm at Padua ? I was told so. I heard about the goings-on there with you and the other men who go to that old—ought I to call it a pub, a slaughter- or an eating-house ?"

"Call it a pub, a low-down pub," replied Mear. "But if you're going to lunch with me, now, we must let the maid at home know."

"Young, is she ?"

"Oh, no, old, my boy, old. What's more I don't go to the *Barba* any more now, you know. No goings-on for three years, now. At a certain age"

"After forty—"

"After forty, you have to have the courage to turn your back on the path which will bring you to a precipice if you follow it. Go down it—h'm well, that's alright, so long as you go ve-ry, ve-ry slowly and gently and don't roll over or come toppling down. Well now, come on up ; here we are. I'm going to show what a good little job I've made of that little home of mine."

"Ve-ry, ve-ry slowly and gently . . . good little job . . . little home of yours," began Gigi Mear's friend as he climbed the steps after him. "A big hulking superlative creature like you with mincing diminutives ! Poor Gigi ! What have they done to you ? Singed your tail ? Do you want to bring the tears to my eyes ?"

"Well. . . ." said Mear as they waited on the landing for the maid to come to open the door, "at this stage, you have to be on good terms with this accursed existence of ours ; fondle it, wheedle it with diminutives, or it will diminutive you. I don't at all want to bring myself to a four-foot grave yet, not I."

"So you believe in man as a biped ?" broke out the other at this point. "Don't say you do, Gigione. I know what efforts I make at times to keep standing on two legs only. Believe me, friend ; if we leave Nature her course we should all be quadrupeds if we had our way. The best thing out ! Nothing more comfortable, a good poise, always well-balanced. The times I could throw myself down to crawl like that with my hands on the ground ! This accursed civilisation is ruining us. If I were a quadruped I should be a fine wild beast. I should land you out a couple of kicks for all the beastly things you've said. I should have no wife, no debts, no anxieties. Do you want to make me cry ? I'm off."

Stupefied by the queerly jocular talk of this friend of his dropped from the clouds, Gigi Mear watched him and racked his brains to think what the devil his name was and how and when he had known him, at Padua whether as a boy or in his student days at the University. He passed and repassed in review all the intimate friends he had had in those days but without success ; not one of them answered to the features of this man. Nevertheless he did not dare to ask to be enlightened on the subject, for the intimacy which the man showed him was so great and of such a kind that he feared to offend him. He determined that he would get at the truth by cunning.

The maid was a long time before answering the door ; she had not expected her master to be back so soon. Gigi Mear rang a second time and she came at last, shuffling her feet.

"Here I am, old girl," Mear said to her. "Back again, and with company. Set for two to-day and look sharp about it. Be careful, for there's no trifling with my friend here who has got a curious name."

"Anthropophagus Goat's Beardhornfoot," said the other with a joke which left the old woman in doubt as to whether she should smile at it or cross herself. "And no one ever wants to know any more about that fine name of mine. Old girl ! It makes bank directors pull a wry face and staggers the money-lenders. My wife's the exception ; *she* was glad enough to take it. It was only the name that I let her take, though, not me, oh no, not me. I'm too handsome a fellow, by all the devils and their souls ! Get along, Gigi, since you have this weakness and let me see your poor things. As for you, old girl, get a move on. Fodder for the beasts."

Mear, discomfited at the failure of his stratagem, took him the round of the five small rooms of the tiny flat all furnished with the loving care of the man who wants nothing to wish for, no needs which cannot be satisfied within his own house, when once he has decided to make it his snail-shell. There was a little sitting-room, a bedroom, a minute bathroom, a dining-room and a study.

In the little sitting-room his amazement and his torture were increased when he heard this friend chatting of the most intimate and private things in his family, as he surveyed the photographs displayed on the mantelpiece.

"Gigione, I wish I had a brother-in-law like yours. If you knew what a rascal mine is !"

"Does he treat your sister badly, then ?"

"No, he treats *me* badly. It would be such an easy thing to him to help me in these straits ! But, oh no, not he."

"Forgive me," said Mear. "I can't just remember your brother-in-law's name."

"Never mind, you *can't* remember it—you don't know him. He's been at Padua barely two years. Do you know what he did to me ? Your brother who's been so kind to me had promised me help, if that wretch would have taken my bills of exchange—but would you believe it ? He refused me the signature. And then your brother, who, when all is said and done, although most friendly, is an outsider, was so indignant that he took it into his own hands. Our affair is a sure enough

thing. . . . But if I were to tell you the reason for my brother-in-law's refusal ! . . . I'm still a handsome dog, you can't deny it, a taking sort of fellow, I'll make no bones about saying so. Well, my brother-in-law's sister had the unfortunate idea of falling in love with me, poor girl. Jolly good taste, but not much tact. Just imagine whether I would. . . . Well, she poisoned herself."

"Dead ?" said Mear, pausing.

"No. She vomited a bit, and that cured her. But you can see that it was impossible to me to set foot in my brother-in-law's house after that tragedy. Good heavens, are we going to have anything to eat or not ? I can scarcely see for hunger. I'm as famished as a wolf !"

Later on at table, Gigi Mear, irked by the affectionate confidences of his friend who pelted him with bad words and for a wonder did not touch him, began to ask news of him of Padua and of this and that acquaintance, hoping to get him to let slip his own name by some chance, or at least (in his exasperation, which was growing stronger every minute) to find distraction, himself, from the obsession to get at it by talking of other things.

"Come now, give me a bit of news—what about that Valverde chap, the director of the Bank of Italy, with the lovely wife and that great lump of a sister who squinted, if I'm not mistaken. Are they still at Padua ?"

His friend burst into a roar of laughter at the question.

"What's the matter ?" said Mear, his curiosity awakened. "Doesn't she squint ?"

"Stop a moment, for heaven's sake stop !" begged the other, unable to restrain his laughter, which shook him in convulsive spasms. "Squint ? I should just think she does ! And her nose is so wide that you can see up to her brains ! That's *the* woman."

"What woman ?"

"My wife !"

Gigi Mear, stunned by the shock, had just sufficient force to mumble something more or less foolish by way of an excuse.

But the other man began to laugh even harder and longer than at first. At length he quietened down, frowned, and gave a deep sigh.

"My dear man," he said, "there are unknown heroisms in life which the most unskilled fancy of the poet could never conceive."

"Yes, indeed !" sighed Mear. "You're right . . . I know what you mean."

"You don't, at all," came the other's contradiction, an immediate reply. "Do you believe that I'm alluding to myself? I, the hero, when at most I'm only the victim? Scarcely. The heroism was my sister-in-law's—the wife of Lucio Valverde. Listen to me a bit—heavens ! What a blind stupid idiot of a man."

"I?"

"No, I. I ! To manage to deceive myself that Lucio Valverde's wife was in love with me up to the point of marrying her husband, who, in all conscience, and this you may believe, Gigione—would have deserved it. But goodness—what do you think happened instead? Example of disinterested spirit of sacrifice, as you'll hear. Valverde goes off, or rather pretends to go off as usual (she being in the know). She then lets me into the house. When the tragic moment of being surprised together comes, she hides me in the sister-in-law's room—the lady with the squint, who, receiving me in a duly chaste and trembling fashion, appeared to be sacrificing herself, too, for the peace and honour of her brother. I scarcely had the time to shout 'But, my dear lady, wait a minute, how can Lucio possibly believe in earnest . . . '—I hadn't finished when in burst Lucio, raging with fury, and you can imagine the rest."

"What !" exclaimed Gigi Mear, "you with all your brains."

"And my notes of credit?" bellowed the other, "my notes of credit on sufferance for which Valverde was allowing me the renewal by the pretended good graces of his wife? He'd have rejected them then at once—d'you see?—and ruined me. Low down trick ! Don't let's say any more about it, please. . . .

After all the fact being that I haven't a halfpenny of my own, and that I'm not ever likely to have ; taking into consideration, too, that I've no intention of marrying. . . ."

"What !" Gigi Mear interrupted at this juncture. "You married her !"

"Oh no, I promise you. She married *me* : *she* only was married. I told her beforehand. Straight dealing and part friends. 'Young lady, you want my name. Well then, you take it ; I scarcely know what to do with it, upon my word.' But that's enough, eh ?"

"Then," ventured Mear, pausing triumphant, "there was nothing more to it. Then her name was Valverde, and now it's—"

"Exactly," laughed the other, rising from table.

"No, listen !" exclaimed Gigi Mear, able to bear it no longer and taking his courage in both hands, "you've made me pass a delightful morning ; I've treated you as if you were my brother. Now you must do me a favour."

"Perhaps you'd like my wife as a loan ?"

"No, thanks. I want you to tell me your name."

"I ? My name ?" asked his friend, astonished, tapping his chest with his forefinger as though he did not believe in his own existence. "What do you mean ? Don't you know ; can't you remember ?"

"No," confessed Mear, abashed. "Forgive me, call me the most forgetful man on earth, but I could almost swear to it that I've never seen you."

"Oh ? Very good, very good ! . . ." replied the other. "My dear Gigione, put your hand here. Thank you with all my heart for your lunch and your company—and I'm off without telling you. And that's that !"

"You shall tell me, damn you !" burst out Gigi Mear, jumping to his feet. "I've racked my brains for a whole morning and I shan't let you go before you tell me."

"Murder me," replied his friend, calmly and nonplussed. "Cut me in pieces ! But I shan't tell you."

"Go on, be a good fellow," Mear began again, changing his

tone. "I've never had an experience like this before—this loss of memory, you know ; and I swear to you that it's a most painful sensation, you're an obsession with me now. Tell me your name, for heaven's sake."

"Go and find out."

"Look here. My forgetfulness hasn't hindered me from giving you a place at my table and as a matter of fact, even if I have never known you, you've become most dear to me, believe me. I've a very brotherly feeling for you ; I admire you ; I should like you always with me. So tell me your name."

"It's no good, you know," said the other positively, "you don't miss me ever. Just be reasonable. Do you want to deprive me now of the unexpected pleasure of letting you be duped not knowing who's been your guest ? No, go away ; you want too much and I can see well enough that you've no recollection of me. If you don't want me to be hurt that you've forgotten me like this let me go away as I am doing."

"Go off then, quickly, that's all I ask," snapped Mear pettishly. "I can't bear to see you in front of me any longer."

"Alright, I'm going. But first, one little kiss, Gigi ; I'm off again to-morrow."

"I won't," bawled Mear, "unless you tell me—"

"No, no : that's all. And now, good-bye—" said the other cutting him short.

And he went off laughing, turning again at the top of the stairs to blow him a kiss.

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(VI)

A LITTLE WINE

(Translated by Miss M. LANKESTER)

I HAD gone into the "Wine-Cellar Inn," I who never drink wine, to keep a foreign friend of mine company. He seems unable to go to bed without first providing himself, every evening, with a good glassful.

Two rooms communicating by an archway in the middle ; one lower than the other, which was up three steps ; both gloomy, with the walls half covered with wooden panels. The first room contained the drink bar, which was dark, greasy and dusty, and an old cash desk in front ; the other, where we had sat down, with a single row of heavy tables varnished yellow, four lamps which hung from the ceiling, and a stove.

Early in the evening there was nobody there. Two men who had already emptied their first bottle sat in silence, taciturn, with their heads on their chests, in one corner. Suddenly one of them opened his mouth, and uttered a long sigh, repeated it and so continued. The other turned to look at him.

"And you're braying like that, my friend !" Then he turned to us and added :

"But that's the way to yawn !"

This sulky manifestation of bestial annoyance increased the disgust which I felt since I had entered that place ; I rose and cried to my friend :

"Hurry up ! Please !"

But my friend, putting down his glass still half full of thick black wine, shut his eyes and swallowed the sip he had taken, with such childishly frank pleasure that the annoyance I felt at once broke out in laughter. I sat down again, humiliated by the knowledge that I was staying there, procuring him this pleasure.

In the meanwhile newcomers had arrived. Some were playing cards in the other room. Every now and then we heard shouts and swearing, then no more. There came also an old blind man, with one eye that blinked whitely and almost laughingly ; he carried a guitar round his neck, and was led by a thin little girl, with a fringe of tow-coloured hair on her forehead, a piteous sight. But suddenly she started to sing, distractedly, with a voice that did not seem to be her own, and so piercing that it aroused a general protest, and she was sent away.

At one time a strange couple came to the table next to ours ;

an old gentleman with an air of nobility, hollow-chested, almost a living corpse, led by the hand by a young serving-man whose big hairy head looked as if it were placed on his shoulders without a neck ; his face was ill-looking, swollen, with dark-ringed eyes that looked gentle through their lashes, eyes that held the painful opacity of turquoises. Full of careful attention for the old gentleman whose legs bore him with difficulty, without letting go his hand, he guided him between two tables, pushed out a chair, and very gently sat him down like a doll. Then he went to the other room and returned quickly with a jug of white wine and a glass, which he placed before him on the table ; and then went away.

The old gentleman remained motionless, his hands placed together on his legs. He had a very fine head but rather sunken in ; on both sides, crossways like hand-writing, were two fish-eyes ; and his cheeks were marked with a close network of little purple veins. He was well dressed, with spotless simplicity. But what an ugly sight it is and how sad when, from the cut or the quality of the material, it is evident that a coat is three or four years old, and has remained brand new, without crease or stain, and one sees it worn by an old man ! Looking at it, one was sure that he would die with that coat which had stayed new for four years, and that perhaps he already felt dead in it.

A fly gave me the proof of it. Hardly had he sat down on the chair when it started to worry him stubbornly. But he didn't even attempt to raise a hand to brush it off. Just then the doubt seized me that he was not able to do so, and from that doubt arose a certain irrepressible frenzy in seeing that fly greedily attacking some heat-spots that were on his forehead. I was just about to brush it off myself, when he turned his head very slowly towards me and said with a calm, melancholy smile :

"Some flies have this nature, that scarcely is a man dead that they know it at once ; by what means no one can tell. And as soon as they know it they come to settle on him to gorge themselves on the sweat of death."

Having said this he turned his head again to remain motionless in his chair, as before.

Now it has certainly never happened that a corpse, stretched out on the bed between four candles, has lifted a hand to chase away a fly from his forehead or nose. But that old gentleman, although looking like a corpse, was sitting in an inn, had moved his head, had spoken to me. His hands alone seemed to be powerless of motion. And the jug of wine remained before him, there on the table with the empty glass beside it. With my eyes I sought the servant, who perhaps had started to speak to somebody and had forgotten to attend to his master. I could not see him anywhere ; and so, being able to bear no longer the sight of the poor old man's inability, I stretched my hand out to the bottle to pour some wine into the glass and to help him to drink. But to my amazement I saw him suddenly raise one hand from his knees to restrain mine. He smiled, slightly bowing his head ; placed his hand again on his knee, and said to me :

"Thanks, don't trouble yourself ; I'm not drinking." I looked at him, surprised ; I looked at the bottle, as if to ask him why his servant had put it there in front of him ; the old gentleman read the question in my eyes and answered :

"Only for pretence. It's not wine."

"It's not wine ? Then what is it ?"

"Nothing. Coloured water. I drink wine strong though it be, a little—but neat. Try and pour me a drop from your friend's glass, and see what will happen."

Curious, I took the bottle of wine my friend was drinking, and was just going to pour a little into the old man's glass, when suddenly the servant rushed in from the other room ; he had evidently been watching. He covered the glass with his hand and sighed with exasperation.

"Marquis !"

Then turning to me :

"Please, gentlemen ! I am the one who answers for it later !"
And he went, carrying the glass away with him.

The old gentleman again smiled that calm melancholy smile,

nodding his head gently ; then he shut his eyes and heaved a deep sigh.

“Poor Costantino !”

It seemed to me to be no longer necessary to take all this seriously, so I asked him :

“He forbids you to drink, eh ?”

He replied :

“Not he ; it’s my son who forbids it ; and not on account of my health either, but so that I shall not offend the decorum of the household by the merriness that comes over me when I take a drop of neat wine. Costantino would willingly drink some too. He can’t, on pain of death. He’s very ill. Very ill and burdened with a family, poor devil. I abstain from drinking out of pity for him. He’d be sacked at once if he took me back home, I don’t say unruly, but just rather lively. Oh ! believe me, not more than lively ; because I should always in every case follow the strict rule : never to go, when drinking, either beyond or below the exact point. A little beyond, liveliness gets beyond control ; a little below, you do not get warmed to liveliness, and in that case, gloominess holds you. Here’s the comparison. Torches, sir, lighted in the daytime for a funeral. The flame cannot be seen in the sun. What do you see instead ? Their smoke. Do you see ?”

With a finger he drew that smoke in the air, and remained silent.

Indeed the comparison, now that I come to think of it, had not got that clarity of relationship that rhetoric deems necessary in order that a comparison shall be successful ; but as he said it at the time, with such meticulously elegant breeding, gentle voice and death-like composure, it not only seemed to be most fitting, but also the most suitable and appropriate one he could have chosen. I became again greatly interested in him with a new and more lively curiosity, and I asked him why, since he was not able to drink, he made his servant bring him into an inn.

“Ah, why !” he sighed. “So that I can see my sadness (which is great) like a poor beggar-woman at the door, which,

as soon as it is opened to her, makes her at once see her own poverty. You are young ; you love, hope, desire ; you see the world as your love, your hope and your desire. But if by accident it were emptied of all that, the world would become something quite different to you. And yet would it be more true than it is now when you love, hope and desire ? These are all immaterial wines. When I was already an old man, I used to put inside me just the smallest drop of material wine so that I could still find the world supportable. My son wishes it no longer, for the decorum of the household. And then there's that poor Costantino. . . . Well, I comfort myself here by proving to myself that my great sadness which is now real enough, would soon disappear if I but drank the smallest drop of wine. You might then argue that neither, in that case, would my happiness be true, since it depended on the wine I should have drunk. And I don't contradict you. But if we go back to the beginning, what is there that is true, sir ? What is there that does not depend upon that which we put inside us in order to create this or that truth ? Now, you just listen . . .”

From the two rooms of the inn, which had seemed to me at first so gloomy, there arose a merry uproar. I looked round, and all the faces seemed changed, some clearer, some flushed. Four gentlemen at a table, their backs straightened, leaning towards one another with their heads nearly touching, were chanting with great enjoyment goodness knows what music, singing through their noses ; some were chatting loudly, others were laughing. And then looking again at the old gentleman, who had reassumed his horrid immobility, like that of an elegant seated corpse, and thinking of all the things he had just finished saying to me, I was moved by a deep pity. That fly was there again on the heat spots. I leaned towards him and said softly :

“But, pardon me, cannot one at least brush away the fly from your forehead ?”

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ADRIANO ZUCCOLI
(1870-1929)



(I)

ADA AND FOSCA

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

THEY resembled each other ; they were both tall and thin, with light brown, almost fair hair ; Ada's eyes too were brown, but Fosca's were grey ; they both laughed readily ; they went to the same school, and sat next to each other on the same form ; they both worked without effort, and without enthusiasm. They spoke very little, never gave any trouble, were always a little dreamy, and replied mechanically to the questions they were asked, looking at the ceiling, as if they could have read on it what they were to say.

Pleasant and ordinary in every way, Fosca Giuntini and Ada Crivelli belonged to middle-class Milanese families, and without being rich, they had enough money to cut good figures on every occasion. The headmistress of the Institute never took any notice of them, so insignificant and elusive were their personalities ; they were two shadows, who were fond of each other, confided their little secrets to each other, often laughed, and did not arouse in their schoolfellows either liking or aversion.

Ada Crivelli married, at nineteen, Vittorio Carminati, a robust youth with broad shoulders and a large face, who was already fond of a good table. Vittorio had enormous hands, which gave some indication of his nature and tastes. He could not hold anything fragile with those hands, or make a gentle caress ; one of them alone was large enough to cover the whole of Ada's pale thin face. Such hands were formed to descend like claws, to seize and hold fast ; and indeed, the day on

which Ada's family had accepted Vittorio's suit he had grasped the girl by the waist, and had raised her from the ground, imprinting upon her face a resounding kiss, which seemed to be the seal of his eager possession of her.

For their honeymoon they were to make a long journey abroad ; but Vittorio stopped with Ada at Como for three days, and the journey was then resumed. Vittorio laughed at this excellent trick that he was playing on their parents and friends, and to render their conduct still more gracious, he forbade Ada to send home any news of herself during these three days. Ada obeyed, and she tried to laugh as uproariously as her husband at this unforeseen interlude. He wanted her to eat and drink a great deal, and not to stand looking at the mountains and the lake, and the sun and the shadows, all such stupid things, which belonged to the melancholy ideas of her past girlhood, and ought not to be of any interest to a married woman.

"To eat, drink and be merry, such is life !" declared Vittorio, who had inherited a large fortune from his father, and rejoiced in it every day.

He was so much in love with his thousand lire notes, that when his steward brought him the rent-money, the dividends of his income, or the profits from the sale of grapes, silkworm cocoons and corn, he would go to fetch Ada, so as to show her the "small volumes" of notes for a hundred or five hundred lire, which he would drop from high above the table, the better to test their weight.

And Ada would look on, and take an interest in them, holding those packets in her still delicate hands, and turning them over slowly, as though they were indeed volumes of the Book of Life.

"You like them, eh ?" said Vittorio, laughing. "What a lot of good things to eat in these !"

Ada laughed too. She already had a high colour, and a heavier figure. Since she had been married she had turned the pages of no books—other than those volumes of notes—nor had she touched the piano.

The house of the Carminati couple was bright and shining, full of all sorts of things, and of brand-new furniture, in which visitors could see themselves reflected. There was a cellar crammed with bottles, flasks and barrels, and a capacious larder, containing an abundance of good things.

"The house is bursting with health, like ourselves !" Vittorio declared to his friends.

During four years of marriage, Ada presented her husband with three children, two boys and a girl ; and completely lost her elegant figure, becoming red-faced and broad in the hips, with a soft and ample bosom. She grew lazy, staying in bed till late, and sometimes dozing after the copious meals. She had little love for her children, who were confided to the care of servants ; she thought of no one but Vittorio, whom she did her best to imitate in his noisy gaiety and in his love of material well-being.

The children ran wild about the house, dressed up to the nines, but little cared-for ; they could speak nothing but their own dialect, and they preferred the kitchen to the dining-room. The eldest, Pieruccio, already understood all about dishes and ragouts, grew more rubicund every month, and ate all day long. The other two, Claudino and Marietta, did their best to keep pace with him, and all three were frequently confined to bed with severe attacks of indigestion.

Ada laughed about it. Yes, yes, they were greedy, they took after their father and mother. They all vied with one another in stuffing them, the cook, the housemaid, the between-maid and the shopkeepers, after visiting whom they would ask the cook to defray their expenses. Such strong, well set-up children needed to eat. And hardly had they recovered from gastritis than they began to gobble again, and continued to do so until they had another attack.

One day Marietta, the smallest one, died of it, after gorging cream, chestnuts, biscuits and candied fruits. There was great grief in the house for more than a week ; at the end of which time, seeing that Ada continued to weep, especially after dinner, Vittorio clapped her on the shoulder and said seriously :

"Now, that is enough, isn't it ? It isn't necessary to make too much of it !"

So that she should not make too much of it, Ada dried her eyes, and no more was said about Marietta. The other two, Pieruccio and Claudio, continued to eat.

Ada experienced another great trouble when it turned out that Giannina, the housemaid, was pregnant. Giannina, a dark little girl of eighteen, believed everything she was told, and it had not been difficult to deceive her by promising her a fine marriage.

Ada would not listen to excuses. She herself was virtuous, and adored her husband ; no man in the world meant anything to her except her Vittorio. In order to cut short the tears and kneeling supplications of Giannina, she had her things thrown out into the street, although it was snowing. The scandal had already been going on too long, without her knowledge, and it was necessary to have done with this wicked girl who had no modesty. A little snow would cool her fancy.

Having thrown Giannina out of doors, Ada had to drink three glasses of Marsala, so great was her agitation ; and when Vittorio returned home he commiserated her, forced her to eat a little more than usual to renew her strength, and praised her for her moral sense.

He was pleased that Ada was growing stout, red-faced and gross, and had a plump white throat ; that she was always laughing, and gave a due importance to good food and good wine. The children too, Pieruccio and Claudino, who were stupid little blockheads, as uneducated as cowboys, were growing taller and fatter. There was room for all of them ; and so a year after the death of Marietta, Ada presented her husband with a fourth child, to whom was given the name of Mario, in memory of the other one. After this confinement, Ada, who was not more than twenty-five years old, seemed to begin to go to pieces ; she lost all ambition, took no more care of her figure, nor of her dress, became fat and shapeless, and seemed drunk with laziness. Her house was always full of

people who came to enjoy her good table, and she did not even take the trouble to pay calls, knowing that her friends, who were of the same mould as herself and Vittorio, would not have gone short of the luscious feasts for the sake of these conventional trifles.

It was a great event in her slow, quiet monotonous life when she came across a tall slim lady, dainty and refined in appearance, who, like Ada, was in a shop, buying some material for a walking-dress.

Ada scrutinised and examined the lady, who was leaning on the same counter, holding in her gloved hands one end of the stuff which the shopman was displaying to her. Having completed her scrutiny, Ada plucked up her courage, came a little nearer to her and said :

"Surely I can't be mistaken. You are Fosca Giuntini, aren't you ?"

The lady threw a rapid glance over her, from head to foot, rather disdainfully ; and the other, seeing that she was not recognised, added :

"I am Ada Crivelli, who have become Ada Carminati. Now do you remember me ?"

A slight smile hovered on the lady's lips, and she offered her hand to her friend. Fosca was so fresh and supple that she seemed to be still a young girl ; her hair had become rather darker, and her clear bright grey eyes had gained a peaceful expression. But somehow she could put a great distance between herself and those to whom she gave that brief, cold little smile of hers.

"I remember," she said. "But you have become such a magnificent and mighty dame that I did not recognise you. I am glad to have met you."

"And I too !" exclaimed Ada. "How many times have I thought of you, over and over again ! And I have never seen you."

"I have spent all these years in the country with my husband, Count Gino Fassini. . . We returned but a short time ago, to settle in town."

"So you are married too. Have you any children? And are you happy? And what about the Count? . . ."

Fosca interrupted politely, with her transient little smile.

"Come and see me. I live in Via Cappuccio."

She held out her hand to her friend, and went out, preceded by the shopkeeper, who accompanied her to her carriage.

Ada followed her slender and graceful figure with attentive eyes. She was astonished. What a great lady! She might have been born a princess: and she really had grown quite beautiful. Ada would have taken care not to say so aloud but she could not deny it to herself, and for the first time she regretted her stout and shapeless figure, and her heavy step—so much too heavy for her age. Five or six years ago she and Fosca had resembled one another, they had lived the same life, and both had been tall, thin and a little dreamy. And Fosca was still active and elegant, and to her youthful grace there was now added an expression of simple nobility which one was forced to admire.

The same day Ada gave some slight description of her to Vittorio, who burst into a roar of laughter.

"Thin and active?" he said. "Why, she must get hungry! There are women who starve themselves in order to have a slim figure. I can't bear these thin women. You are perfect."

When Ada, impelled by uncontrollable curiosity, went to visit Fosca, she kept her eyes wide open, so that she might see everything as well as possible. Fosca lived in the Fassini palace, a dark and gloomy mansion, which savoured of antiquity; everything was venerable; the marble staircase with the wrought-iron balustrades, the vestibule, the ceiling of which had pale gold coffering, the worm-eaten chairs with torn silken upholstery, the unpretentious mirrors in which the glass seemed dimmed with the rust of time.

"What a hole!" thought Ada, while she was waiting in the half-dark drawing-room. "It would not suit me in the least."

And she looked at Fosca, as she came into the room. She appeared very young and slender and graceful in her simple

pale pink dress with a short skirt. The ribbon with which her hair was lightly bound was of the same colour.

"I am going away," thought Ada suddenly, oppressed by that sense of sheer nobility which weighed upon her, and which she could not define.

She was induced to remain, however, by the very kind and courteous manner with which Fosca immediately welcomed her.

"Perhaps you do not care about my house," she said guessing Ada's discomfort. "It is the old Fassini palace, and to Gino it was full of family associations. It was mortgaged, and in order to redeem it we have spent all these years in the country, leading a life almost of hardship. But now we are glad, because we have returned, and recovered the beautiful old things which have such a sentimental appeal for us. And so, you see, now for the first time we can buy back the horses and carriages, and I shall be able to go to a few balls and theatres. I am very happy. Though, as a matter of fact, I have always been happy, because Gino loves me very much, and we have a little boy."

"Only one?" interrupted Ada. "I have had four, and three are alive."

"Only one," repeated Fosca.

"And you can be content to live poorly in the country?" added Ada. "What an idea! I married my Vittorio, who is very rich, and we live in the way he likes. From the very first he gave me all that I wanted in order to eat, drink, enjoy myself, and grow fat, and I have done my best."

She gave a loud laugh.

"Ah, there are no troubles, nor mortgages in our house," she went on, "good dinners and good wine. The cook is the most important person, and we always have friends who chatter and laugh. I hope we shall see you too, and the Count. If my husband were to see you, he would say that you were too thin."

"But it is not your husband that I have to please," observed Fosca quietly.

"You are right ! After all you have kept the appearance of a girl, you still do not look more than nineteen. You can't weigh more than fifty kilograms, I weight seventy-six. Vittorio has subjected me to a course of extra nourishment."

She laughed again, but she felt that Fosca had grown cold, and although she was sitting beside her on the same sofa, she had, as it were, withdrawn herself, and remained looking at her in open astonishment.

"Does your husband not think as mine does ?" asked Ada.

"Oh no !"

"I suppose it is he who has taught you to be so refined and elegant, and so fond of beautiful old things."

"I believe so !" replied Fosca with a candid smile of complacency.

"You really are a Countess," observed Ada, "and this palace is suited to you."

Fosca smiled again, without answering.

As Ada got up to go, a fair, slender little boy of four ran into the room, dressed in a white suit with a collar of fine lace. There was a clear and placid light reflected in his big blue-grey eyes. He was squeezing a shaggy teddy-bear under his arm.

"Valfredo," said Fosca, "Don't you see the lady ?"

"Look what a nice toy !" the little fellow said to Ada, holding out one hand, and planting the teddy-bear under her nose with the other.

"Valfredo," repeated Ada, abstractedly caressing the child. "It is a fine name."

"Yes, it often recurs in the Fassini family. Valfredo IV. It is for his sake that we have made such great and stringent economies !" exclaimed Fosca, drawing the child up to her and kissing him.

"Good-bye, my dear," said Ada, "I have still several calls to pay."

The two ladies embraced. They realised that in those few minutes an abyss had opened between them, and that they would never seek each other's company again.

Ada went out. But in the vestibule she stopped in astonishment.

Already, on her arrival, she had thought that she had caught a glimpse of her, now she saw her plainly, and found that she had not been mistaken.

The neat spruce girl with the little apron, who opened the door for her, was Giannina, the servant that she had driven from her house.

"Wait a moment," she said, "I have forgotten . . ."

She went back, and again reached the threshold of the drawing-room.

Fosca was lying full-length on the carpet, playing with the child, who hid the teddy-bear, and afterwards threw it to her, laughing so much that he rolled on the floor the better to give vent to his mirth.

"Fosca," called the other.

That young lady jumped to her feet, and went to meet her friend.

"Have you forgotten something?" she asked.

Ada signed to her to speak more cautiously, and drew her into a corner.

"I must warn you," she said in a low voice, "that that maid you have is not an honest girl."

"She is perfectly honest. You are mistaken," replied Fosca quietly.

"I tell you she is not," insisted Ada. "I know something about it. She has had a lover, and was to have had a child too. I know, because I had to turn her out of the house."

Fosca smiled.

"Ah!" she said, scrutinising Ada. "It was you who put her on the pavement in the middle of winter, when she was in that condition?"

"Well, what could I do? You know about it, then?"

"Yes, the poor little thing returned to her own village, where I was staying with my husband. Her family drove her out in their turn. We rescued her from the streets, we helped her, and dealt with the question of her child, we saved her in

fact. Now she is prudent, good, honest, and would give her life for me."

Ada remained silent for a moment. Then she said :

"Don't mind her ; at the first opportunity she will go back to her old ways."

"What you are doing is not kind, Ada !" observed Fosca coldly.

"I think it my duty to warn you. She is not honest, and she can't be honest."

"But why do you insist on it, Ada ?" asked Fosca still more coldly.

"Why ? Because I want to do you a service, and remove from your house a person who is not worthy to remain in it."

"And take the bread out of the mouth of a poor woman and her child," concluded Fosca, smiling scornfully.

"No, no !" interrupted Ada heatedly, determined to overcome her resistance. "I see you have remained a child, not only in appearance, but also in your manner of reasoning."

"You take me for a fool," observed Fosca quietly.

"No, but you are simple, inexperienced and ignorant of life. Take care what you are doing. Believe me, who know something of the world. . ."

Fosca's grey eyes flashed with contempt, and she seemed almost to shrink back, with a haughty movement of her head.

"I know how to live," she said. "You know how to eat !"

Ada turned, and went out.

(From "Donne e Fanciulli." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

• AN ARTIST

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

"H A V E you ever visited the little church which stands on the top of Monte San Fausto ?"

"Yes, Countess," replies Arturo Andolfi with remarkable promptitude. "I visited it three years ago. It is very pretty.

I remember that, just half way up, by the little torrent, I happened to slip and fall down : I hurt my knee, and had to call the doctor next day—an extraordinary doctor who gave me a peculiar treatment of his own . . .”

Whereupon Arturo pours out a whole history about the doctor, and his method of treating bruises, and about certain flowers which he had picked at the foot of Monte San Fausto ; and the subject of the little church is dropped. The Countess, as a matter of fact, is slightly surprised at the mention of a torrent, but thinks that perhaps there was one there three years ago, and that it may since have been diverted, and in any case she listens to the little tale, and smiles, and is quite satisfied.

For my part I am ready to swear that Arturo Andolfi has never been inside that church, that he has never seen it, even from a distance, and that he has not the slightest idea where Monte San Fausto is.

I have known him too long : he was lying. Why was he lying ? Perhaps because it vexed him that anyone should see that he had never been up there ; and also to amuse himself, just for the fun of saying Yes, where other people would have said No, and so that he might relate a story.

Arturo Andolfi is a past master in the art of telling lies. He knows the whole gamut, from the smile which signifies one thing, while one is thinking another, to the romance which is invented on the spur of the moment, so as to save a situation, to hide some circumstance, or to arrest and quell a suspicion.

When he is lying, he is quite impassive. His smooth rosy face seems almost melancholy, as though the truth cost him some effort, and he would not reveal it except to his intimate friends ; we mean, of course, the truth which he invents, which he will create out of nothing, and which we, in our prosaic way, should call, simply, fibs.

Arturo's voice is always even and calm, and his look straightforward. His eyes have a feminine expression ; they have long lashes, and are large and ingenuous. They look at you with a gentle persuasiveness, and do not allow you to be suspicious.

And his smile is rather uncertain, almost shy, and seems to appeal for your support and approval. With that voice, those eyes and that smile, with all the personal charm which nature has lavished on him, he has been lying for over thirty years, fearlessly, without fail, as if he were carrying out a sacred duty, in things great and small, for love, or on account of the little church of San Fausto, out of piety, or out of sheer wickedness, as a social obligation, or for the sake of pulling your leg.

And further, he has one quality which helps him—nay, it is necessary to him : a prodigious memory. For memory, which other men use for the business of life, is nothing to Arturo if not primarily the handmaid of lies.

With the help of this most rare and enviable faculty he performs miracles. For example, he delights in telling different lies to different people about the same circumstance, and he will invent for one person particulars which he will relate to another in a different way ; and a month or a year later, if he should happen to repeat this bunkum, first to the one and then to the other, he will disentangle, for each of them in turn, the version which he has dedicated to him from the first, and he will not make a single mistake.

I thought at first that he had a diary, or memorandum-book, in which he noted down the most remarkable fabrications, together with the names of the victims whom he had gulled with them ; but I have had to give up such an idea, because a whole collection of volumes would not be enough for him. He has imprinted it all, indelibly, on his mind.

If I, for instance, should remind him of the great variety of fables with which he has regaled me during the many years of our friendship, he would be capable, all these years afterwards, of repeating to me the first one which he had fobbed off upon me.

Besides which, it is not even necessary for him to remember everything perfectly ; if ever he does happen to make a false move, he will adjust it with incredible dexterity, and extricate himself at once, leaving one with one's mouth open.

His wife—(Arturo has a wife ; can't you imagine her, poor little thing ? She has never succeeded in learning anything about his life ; that is, she has succeeded in learning what he chooses to tell her, which is as much as to say, an extravagant tale, a farce, a jest, anything you like, except the truth)—one day his wife asks him whom he has met in Rome, whence he has returned quite recently. And amongst others, Arturo mentions the name of Count Sgargi.

The same evening, at dinner, in the course of an anecdote, carried away by the fire of his own eloquence, he happens to say :

"Do you know, Sgargi was there too, and he agreed with me . . ."

"But isn't Sgargi in Rome ?" interrupts his wife, ingenuously.

"This is his brother," Arturo returns promptly. "Why, you know him too."

"No, dear."

"Yes, dear."

There follows a short discussion, during which the poor lady makes a desperate effort to remember the Sgargi whom she knows too, and she misses the opportunity of getting to the bottom of it by questioning him.

I was among those present at the dinner table, and I asked myself which of the two really existed, the Sgargi of Rome, or the Sgargi of Milan ? and why Arturo should have invented one there and another here ? We all know that there is only one Count Sgargi in the world, but was he, at this moment, in Milan or in Rome ? . . . The secret remained with the consummate liar.

For, if he is caught out, he does not hesitate a moment to prove to you that you are in the wrong, that you have misunderstood him, that perhaps he has not explained himself clearly ; and in order to explain himself clearly, he will build up round this romance another romance, and you can only penetrate it through such a labyrinth of details and particulars that you are fain to give in, and remain in doubt as to whether you had really misunderstood or not.

And he does not lie solely for his own advantage, but as a professional diversion, or because of his whimsical disposition.

One day Arturo had gone out for an excursion, but instead of returning the same evening, or the same night, he remained absent for three days, fooling about with his friends here and there, while they were expecting him at home. There was no harm in it, nothing that he could not confess ; anyone else in his shoes would have given a frank account of the matter. Arturo is not an ordinary man : he knows that, on the strength of this little episode, there will flow from his imagination a whole complicated series of events that have never happened.

And without any preparation, improvising like those great artists who accomplish in no time the masterpiece to which others might apply themselves for years with laborious effort, he divulges to his relations, who are anxiously questioning him, a wonderful history. He has been fighting a duel. He is late in returning home, because the settlement of an affair of honour is not a thing to be taken lightly ; besides, the ground and weapons had to be chosen, and the conditions agreed. He fought, and wounded his adversary. What about himself ? He has not had so much as a scratch ; turn him round and round, look at him from all sides : not so much as a scratch ! Everything went off as well as possible. His opponent had a sword-stroke on his arm, and is in bed. . . .

"But what an affair !" one of his relations groans uneasily, "To risk your life, and what for, what on earth for ?"

Arturo has not thought out a reason. One does usually fight for some reason, not in order to keep oneself warm, or to get oneself tattooed. And in the poetic rage of invention, our romancer has not foreseen the question, although it is such an obvious one. He does not turn a hair : he just smiles discreetly, with a gentle imploring look : and they all understand. It is the kind of reason which cannot be given : the honour of a woman ! or the dishonour of a woman ! (Honour and dishonour are synonymous in certain cases).

"And now the scandal will come out," remarks the most

logical member of the family, "because the paper will describe the whole thing from A to Z. It's a pretty business ! You were discreet !"

"Nonsense !" interrupts Arturo ; "the papers won't say anything about it. I have already been with my seconds to visit the publishing offices of all the newspapers, and have secured a promise that there shall be no mention of the encounter. They won't say a word. You will see to-morrow that there will be nothing about it in the papers. And you too . . . I do beg you not to mention it. I have let you into the secret, because one should not hide anything from one's family, but don't take advantage of it, I entreat you !" His audience put their fingers to their lips, with an air of mystery. Arturo looks at them all in turn, as they stand in that attitude of conspiracy ; then he smiles, and goes to bed. . . . What an artist !

There was not a word about the duel in the papers next day. Arturo had them all bought for him, threw himself upon them, and scanned them feverishly, while his relations stood round him holding their breath in their agitation. Not a syllable. The journalists had kept their word. Arturo looked round him, with the smile of the previous evening, at seeing all his relations upset and uneasy.

"The dear good people," he thinks to himself. "What a joke that they should swallow it all !"

But when he is not merely jesting, or indulging in an extravaganza, just for practice, but is confronted with a need arising out of the emergencies of his own life,—not always a model of order and virtue,—Arturo will show the lion's claws, and is capable of preparing patiently a whole intrigue, months ahead, with a prodigious cleverness, throwing into his conversation a word to-day, a hint to-morrow, another a fortnight hence. He is "creating the atmosphere," as he says, so that when he sees the pear is ripe, he may give the bough a shake and make it fall.

How was he able to go to Paris for the opening of the latest "Salon," all by himself, without his wife—who is jealous, and

who certainly would not allow him to wander about too much on his own in that city of perdition ?

How was he able to go ? By dint of working quietly and patiently, for six months, at the fabrication of one of his usual romances. To relate it, and to follow it all during this period would take a long time ; but I can give you a summary of it, in the manner of the captions used in the cinema. Here it is :

Arturo makes the acquaintance of Signor Carlo Rosetti—Signor Carlo Rosetti is a picture-dealer—and for five days no more is heard of him.

“Oh ! do you know, I met Rosetti this morning.”—Silence for three days.—“That fellow Rosetti is a character ! I met him to-day, and he kept me discussing pictures for an hour.” Another silence for eight days.—“By the way, that fellow Rosetti has got it into his head that I know something about modern painting ; our last chat gave him that idea ; and he says that my advice would be most useful to him.”—Silence for a fortnight.—“By the way, I wanted to tell you : Rosetti is going to Paris for the *vernissage*.” He is not mentioned for another eight days. One evening, at the theatre, Arturo makes, from his seat, a friendly signal to someone unseen. “Whom are you greeting ?” asks his wife. “I am greeting Rosetti. Would you like me to introduce him to you ? I will go to fetch him !” “You are out of your senses !” replies the lady. Arturo smiles, he was certain of the answer.—“Rosetti has made me an absurd proposal : he would like me to accompany him to Paris, and advise him about his purchases.”—Silence for three days.—“But really, you know, I am getting fed up with that fellow Rosetti. He goes about telling everyone that I shall accompany him to Paris, to help him with his selection, that I have critical ability, and a most enviable artistic culture.”—Silence for a week.—“Oh dear ! I can’t hold out any longer : they are all talking to me about Paris, about the *vernissage*, about Rosetti and our approaching journey.”—“I must admit to you, my dear, that I shall look a fool if I remain here.”—“I shall have to go, but just see to what I have been reduced by the chatter of that ass ! A

fortnight? Why, eight days or even four days will be long enough. I am going because of all these people, and so that it shall not be said that I have been talking through my hat." Silence for twenty-four hours, and then the final stroke: "Yes, of course, no one is more vexed about it than I am, dear; but who could have imagined that the gossip of that dealer would actually have obliged me to make a journey to Paris? Don't fly into a passion, little one; I shall go, and return at once. Ah! if in future I am introduced to a picture-dealer I shall box his ears! . . . Do you want me to make myself ridiculous by remaining here, while they are all expecting to see the purchases that I have advised? Paris is not at the other end of the world. . . . The women? What on earth do you mean? Women are the same everywhere. . . . Aren't there women here too? Ah! that fellow Rosetti.—It is the first time he plays such a trick on me, but it is also the last."

And, in short, having for the time being obtained the consent of his wife, Arturo gets into the train—alone, of course, because Rosetti has preceded him by a day, in order to have a preliminary look round—and he travels up to Paris, where he stays for a month. In Paris, I would have you believe, he was not alone, as he had been in the train.

Nevertheless, though it had been prepared and worked out with such subtle skill, this comedy nearly succeeded in bringing him to disaster. In Paris he amused himself too well, and notwithstanding the fact that he had written to his wife a number of times, giving her news of their purchases, and of the advice which he had given, the poor woman began to be suspicious. Left alone, even a woman is capable of reasoning, and, what is more important, of reasoning well.

So that, when at last he returned from his expedition, Arturo was surprised when she said unexpectedly:

"You know, I should like to make the acquaintance of this famous Rosetti."

"But didn't you refuse when I wanted to introduce him to you?"

"Then, yes; but not now."

"Of course. My friend will be delighted, dear fellow. He is an intelligent, cultivated man, and he is circumspect, he will not displease you . . ."

Although he has said these words with his usual tranquil smile, Arturo is far from tranquil. He has never faced such an appalling danger, and he has to devote a day to "working out" the deception which shall save him; and he "works it out" with his usual cat-like patience, cautiously, hour by hour.

And so, some days after this conversation, Rosetti falls ill. They do not know for some time what is the matter with him; the doctors do not agree; then the illness declares itself; it is appendicitis—a royal illness; and of course it is complicated by the fear of peritonitis. . . . Poor Rosetti. So young, so worthy, so active, and now so ill. Who would ever have thought it in Paris, when he was discussing art, arguing excitedly with his artist friends and working all day long with such enthusiasm.

One morning I was just about to go out, when Arturo Andolfi was announced, and he appeared before me, clad in black frock-coat, black trousers, black tie and gloves, and top hat in hand.

"*Che diavolo !*" I exclaimed, when I saw him; "where on earth have you come from?"

"I have come from poor Rosetti's funeral. He died the day before yesterday . . ."

"Who?"

"Rosetti the picture-dealer," repeated Arturo, and he broke into a deep guffaw.

Then, with the cynicism which he keeps for me alone, perhaps because I was at school with him, and have read his mind many times since, he told me the whole story.

"It was a serious danger," he concluded. "How could I present to my wife a sociable friend, who only existed in my imagination? It is true that I greeted him at the theatre one evening, but I greeted the empty air; and I also offered to introduce him to my wife; but if she had consented I should

have made the round of the stalls, and should have returned saying that he had left the theatre at that very moment. But here the matter was much more difficult ; my wife put an obstacle in the way, for she spoke to me every day about Rosetti, with such insistence that I should have ended by believing that he really existed. It was absolutely necessary to cut him short ; I killed him, and to-day I have buried him."

Arturo drew out of an inside pocket of his frock-coat a black-edged sheet of paper, and added :

"You see, here is the announcement of his death, which arrived by post yesterday. I was quite overcome by it. . . . And my wife too, is rather sad, she has been very kind for the last two days, so that she may not increase my sorrow. When you see her, do speak to her about poor Rosetti, because at home we are talking about nothing else . . ."

"You are a great buffoon," I exclaimed laughing.

"No, you mustn't laugh," said Arturo, reprovingly, sitting down and lighting a cigarette. You mustn't laugh, because the death of poor Rosetti is a serious loss to me. I had counted on making important voyages in his company, even as far as India. Now that he is dead I don't know how to get myself there.

"For India you might invent a maharajah," I observed.

"That's an excellent idea !" replied Arturo, seriously. "You have some gumption, too : but if I pull it off, I promise you that when the voyage is over I shall leave him in his own country. I cannot kill off everyone with whom I travel !"

He rose, and came up to me to take his leave.

Now I must go. I must have lunch, and change my clothes. Mind ! one little word about poor Rosetti to my wife : I should be most grateful Good-bye, I have only just time to eat and change my clothes, because at three o'clock I am expecting an English gentleman. . . ."

I interrupted him, sharply.

"Look here," I said, "it is no use inventing nonsense for me ! I don't believe it."

"No, no. I am expecting an English gentleman, I give you

my word !” protested Arturo with an expression of sincerity. Countess Fiora is sending him to me. You remember that, one day at your house, we talked about the little church of San Fausto ? Well, the Countess is sending me this English gentleman, so that I may give him information about the church, and the hill, and the quickest way of getting up there ! . . .”

Arturo was silent for a moment, and then burst out laughing.

“It’s a fine state of affairs,” he exclaimed as he was going. “If that gentleman finds his way up the hill by following my instructions, I shall say that he is a genius—a topographical genius !”

He went out, and I heard his resounding laughter still echoing through the hall. He was happy : he had fooled his wife, and he was about to fool the Englishman, and the Countess. . . . Or had he fooled me, with the little tale of the Countess and the Englishman ?

No one will ever know. . . .

(From “Primavera.” Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

UGO OJETTI

(1871-)



THE SIN AND ITS PENANCE

(Translated by Miss A. B. HILLEARY)

DON PIETRO had already taken off his chasuble and amice after Mass was over. The five or six boys of the Christian doctrine, who had come with a great clatter of wooden shoes to kiss Don Pietro's hand, were hardly out when Checchino the sacristan said to him "Prosit," and after drawing the bolt of the door into the church, went off to the kitchen garden to keep an eye on the preserved tomatoes spread out on five boards in the sun and beset by flies.

Don Pietro looked at the chalice, the paten, the communion cloth, chasuble and maniple left carelessly there in a heap on the top of the cupboard by Checchino and sighed, and after loosening his girdle began to extricate himself from his cassock over his head, slowly, so as not to undo too much the thousand pleated pipings that had been pressed on it with an iron by the nuns of Saint Anna—ironers so skilful that they could write in Gothic characters on the bishop's vestments "Viva Maria" in pleating made with the point of the iron. His head was already hidden in the cassock when he heard a knocking at the door into the church. He stopped and made no answer. The knocking began again resolutely. Don Pietro approached the door with his head still in his vestment and his arms spread out like a coat-hanger to keep it up.

"Who is it?"

"Santino."

"Go and wait at the Vicarage, as I'm in the middle of dressing."

"That's impossible—I must speak to you here."

"At once?"

"At once, Don Piè."

Don Pietro went back to the cupboard, finished getting out of his vestment, folded it up again with the sleeves crossed, and opened the door. Santino was a strong, dark, bald-headed man, getting on for forty with a moustache growing grey, black eyebrows and a scar across the right temple. Having emigrated to America he had returned according to some with a great deal of money, according to others without a penny. He lived alone; he busied himself as an agent in some cattle markets; he often left for Rome and stayed there for as much as a month, carrying in his pocket the key of his cottage. In the village this mere suspicion of mystery gave him authority. Every Sunday he went to attend Mass in the church, but he did not confess and he did not receive Communion even at Easter.

"What's happened?"—asked Don Pietro washing his hands in the tin basin and drying them on the double towel hung up in the wooden roller.

"I must speak to you, Don Piè."

"Say on, say on,"—but Santino was silent, standing still in the middle of the vestry, with his hat in his hands. Don Pietro, who was bending down to spread out the chasuble and manipule in the drawer for the vestments, turned and took a sidelong glance at Santino.

"Have you to tell me something in confession?"

"Precisely."

Don Pietro was jubilant, but he kept his composure as if his interlocutor had not done otherwise than confess himself every day, for he knew that new converts are alarmed over nothing and the most sincere conversions are those which are the least impressive, made without exclamations and weeping, on an ordinary speaking level. He put his stole round his neck and sat down near the prie-Dieu.

"Come here. Kneel down. Do you know the Confiteor?"

"Don Piè, I would rather remain seated. I have a great deal to tell you,"—and as a practical man he added :

"Indeed you have not yet had coffee. If you like, go up now and I'll wait for you here."

This familiarity, so modest, began to displease the parish priest, however natural he himself wished every word to seem :

"Don't bother about me, my son. Remain seated if you like, provided that you fully realise the solemnity of the act which you are about to fulfil."

Santino calmly crossed the vestry again to go and bolt the door. Then he sat down and focussing his gaze on the drawer with the vestments, the end of which remained open, he observed without a shadow of compunction :

"You have some beautiful chasubles, Don Piè, and all new ones."

"It is the goodness of the faithful."

"And you have changed this village church into so noble a palace (forgive me, if I speak irreverently) our Saviour must be better pleased at coming here than to Spoleto Cathedral. New pictures, gilt candle-sticks, illuminated oremuses, carpets and laces."

"Charity of the faithful, I tell you. The church for three years now has received considerable gifts. I have announced it from the altar. But let us speak of yourself and in all seriousness. How long is it that you have not confessed?"

Santino who had put his hat on the cupboard went quietly over to pick it up again, for he could not speak without turning it round and round in his hands, and went back and sat down again :

"Don Pietro, in speaking of the restorations of the church I am already confessing."

"I don't understand."

"Seal of confession we have said, have we not? You cannot repeat a word of what I am going to say under pain of excommunication."

"I know, my son, I know. Do what you have come to do and don't lose yourself in prating."

"Very well then, these three years every Christmas Eve you have found in the alms box an envelope with a thousand inside. These three thousand lire were given by me."

Don Pietro jumped to his feet.

"You ? You ?"

"Yes Me. Do you want the proofs ? Compare those envelopes with this, the seal with this. The paper in which each one of those notes was wrapped was torn in one corner, isn't that so ? You still have those pieces of paper ? Compare them with these three bits : they will fit together perfectly." And he drew out of his pocket an envelope containing all these articles he had enumerated. Don Pietro for a moment had remained uncertain, not of the truth of Santino's words, but of his own satisfaction. For three years he had pictured to himself that anonymous donor after his own fancy, every year more beautiful, purer and more distinguished. Sometimes, in praying for him, he had ended in believing in a miracle even, in thinking that God had gone as far as to take the form of that paper and bank note to succour his faithful servant and embellish his poor church. And now Santino had turned up. Though shaping his features to an expression of a cordial joy, he had to admit that this was not a divine revelation and that the gift, at bottom, was worth more than the giver. But he thought of his duty, he thought of his church become indeed with his assistance a regal palace famous throughout the diocese, he thought also a little of the future and taking the two hands with which Santino was still clutching his hat, he shook them two or three times :

"But why in confession ? This oughtn't to be a mystery, everyone must admire our benefactor . . ."

But Santino's face remained unchanged and indifferent.

"Let me finish,"—and once more he sat down.

Don Pietro also returned to his seat, ready to grant every indulgence. He also studied that large bald red head, those bushy unkempt whiskers, those rough garments, that waist-

coat with its three buttons opened on his rounded belly, those hands as red as sausages—the hands which had given three thousand lire. Santino had shut his eyes, screwing up his eyelids, his lips and his jaw, his whole face shrivelled as if to swallow a large mouthful too big and too bitter. He opened them suddenly and gasped out :

“That money—I had stolen it.”

“No !” exclaimed Don Pietro, beginning to tremble. “No ! It can’t be true ! The money you gave to the Lord’s church ? The money with which I have honoured our Lord, offering him there those altars, those pictures and chandeliers and these vestments ? It isn’t true !”—and on his feet again he took off his stole shouting : “ And you tell me these things in confession ? You must tell them to the sergeant of the Carabinieri, not to me ! To the sergeant ! ”

But Santino had seized the stole and throwing it about Don Pietro’s neck like a halter, dragged him back again to the kneeling desk and, with his two hands on the shoulders of Pietro, who was a little old man all bones, he forced him to sit down again. Then sitting down in front of him on the other chair, with his knees apart as if to grip him with a pair of pincers :

“Don Pietro,” he said, “one doesn’t joke with me. I came to you as a good Christian to confess my worst sins. You can absolve me or you need not absolve me, but you cannot interrupt me, nor denounce me. Otherwise what sort of a priest are you ?”

The poor priest was still shaking. Adjusting the old stole and smoothing out the creases made by Santino’s hands with his palm, he stammered :

“You are right, my son. You are right. Pardon a poor old man who did not know what he was doing. I have sinned as much as you, now, nay more than you. Forgive me and speak.”

Santino had become quiet again.

“I have a little more now to say to you. I stole about four thousand lire four years ago, six thousand lire two years ago . . .”

"Count Anzilei's safe? It was you who on a Sunday, when all were at Mass . . ."

"Let me go on. And three thousand lire last year. Tell me what penance I must do and absolve me."

"Penance? Absolution? But I must see your soul, not only your actions. Have you repented of what you have done?"

"So much so that the other day I had the chance of pulling off a magnificent piece of work, and didn't do it. That seems to me to be enough."

"It isn't enough, it isn't enough. You must repair the damage done to your victims."

"First of all, they are rich people who one may say have not felt any loss. One of them has not even denounced the theft because he is afraid that the tribunal will take away what I left him, in addition."

"But it is the action for itself . . ."

"And then I haven't a penny left."

"What have you done with all that sum?"

"Part of it I've spent . . . ill spent and for this also I am repentant. Part of it I've invested in interests which have all gone to the bad. And the other part, a large part . . ."

"Where is it?"

"But I've given it to you, Don Pietro!"

The blow was once more a heavy one. Don Pietro, before all this amazing news, had almost forgotten his own damage. He passed his hand over his forehead studded with drops of sweat.

"But why did you give it me?"

"To ask God's forgiveness for the crime I had committed. Is that a sin too? Ought I to have kept it all for myself?"

"Oh! but no! no! you ought to have returned it all; that is what you ought to have done."

"If I had done it, I should not be here to-day and you during these three years would have had nothing. I have done wrong, I know. But I was born a Christian and I want to die with God's forgiveness. You have the power to give it me. Are you going to?"

Don Pietro felt as if he would faint, he had become as white as his hair.

"My son, I am not well . . ."

"You have not broken fast. I told you before."

"I am not well, I cannot think. The blow has been too heavy. Come back again to-morrow . . . No, the day after. I'll think about it and examine the case . . . yours and mine . . . because, you see, I too with all the church restored like this . . . and with that money . . ."

"All right. I'll come again the day after to-morrow. But try to cheer up and not say a word. . . Even for the church, here, it would not be prudent."

"You think it likely ! This is confession, confession : and I know my duty."

Santino had got up, he had picked up his hat again. Don Pietro remained seated, as if stunned. The other took him gently by one arm and helped him to get up.

"Say at least an Ave Maria to the Madonna ?"

"In this state of affairs ? I will only when you have given me an answer."

Don Pietro could hardly walk.

"Leave everything to me. I'll shut up"—said Santino.

And he finished putting away the amice in the drawer, he folded the stole and maniple on top, shut up the cupboard and went and put the key in a hiding place on the frame of the washstand.

"How do you know that we hide the key there ?"

"Go and have your coffee, Don Pietro. I shall go out by the church."

And he went out.

* * *

The most urgent problem for Don Pietro now was to free his church from the shame of those gifts. With the first donation he had had the roof mended, the three naves painted a pinky colour with the plinth and door-posts pale blue. With the second he had had the altar to the Madonna of the Rosary erected in stucco and plaster, and a huge picture painted by

an artist, who taught drawing at the college at Spoleto, for the altar of the Madonna of the Rosary. Among the Christians kneeling before the Virgin he had even had himself painted with his hands joined and his face turned towards the congregation. With the third gift he had bought the chandeliers and the illuminated oremuses for the high altar and two ornamented "in quarto" which looked almost like gold.

Each time he had described, from the pulpit, his plans to the congregation and when the work was done, the finished articles, telling in addition of the mysterious way in which these offerings had reached him. And at every offering he had invited the faithful to partake in a triduum so that the Lord might protect with all His grace this generous unknown benefactor. How was he to turn back now? How were all those good things to be undone and those prayers withdrawn? It may be added that the mason, the carpenter and painter, spurred on by the munificent anonymous one's example, had all worked for less than usual; knowing the truth, they could easily come to claim the difference. The truth? And how could he heroically announce it to the faithful without failing in his duty as confessor? And in only taking down the picture and removing from the altar the new chandeliers, would he not lead the faithful to suspect and raise a scandal worse than the present shame which was known only to him?

He descended again into the empty church. The sun, entering from the window above the altar of Saint Espedito, was just lighting up the very picture of the Madonna of the Rosary sitting on clouds, between two well-fed and flying angels, one of whom held up in his right hand a rosary and a scapular, and the other a red ship as small as a toy to indicate that that worship had been founded as a thanksgiving for the victory of Lepanto. Don Pietro knelt down in front of her to ask her counsel—and, instead, another scruple flashed across his mind. Had not that image been bought with a thief's money?—And could it, notwithstanding the benedictions, be worshipped? And by leaving it there, would he not be making all the believers run the same risk of sacrilege?

His mind turned back to lose itself in a labyrinth. At last an idea seemed to bring him back to safety : to go and see the actual people who had been robbed, tell them the truth without naming anyone, and ask them to confirm the gift which they had involuntarily made. Perhaps they were all three good Christians. And if they weren't ? The important point now was to get those three names from Santino. One was Count Anzilei ; and even he after all wasn't certain.

He wanted to go and see Santino, at once. But what would they say, who saw him enter that mysterious dwelling ? And might not Santino himself be frightened by that haste and try to withdraw himself from the right path ? Don Pietro calmed himself with the thought that it was in his power to give him absolution only after he had revealed three names.

In the meantime he wanted to get the picture removed from the altar. He remembered that the artist and the carpenter had set the wooden frame in the stone frame quite easily, without any need to solder it with wedges or patch stones : and after breakfast he called Checchino. But the latter, when he had received this strange commission, looked at him with his usual protecting air :

"Don Pietro, you are not well."

Don Pietro went to a great length to explain to him that he had discovered a very grievous canonical error in a certain quality depicted there. It was a lie, for the sake of good, because he could not tell the truth and because he ought not to have compromised Santino and the faithful must be saved from the contamination.

"But let the mistake alone. Who has noticed it ? Not even the bishop when he came for the confirmation. Think of what the faithful will say. That image already gives pardons. . . Does it displease you ?"

"Let us go down. That picture must be got out before Benediction."

"Don Pietro, I've told you, you're not well. Sleep on it. Wait till to-morrow."

But the poor old man insisted on going down into the church

and helping the sacristan with his own hands to jerk the canvas out of its frame. He himself received it in his arms, carried it into the vestry, turned it face to the wall : and breathed more freely.

That evening, at Benediction, men and women became alarmed to see the altar pictureless and the rough wall of bricks and mortar within the stone. Between one verse and the next of the *Tantum ergo* Don Pietro could hear the murmur of the crowd from the high altar. When he turned round to give the blessing, he noticed that many, distracted by the incident, standing in front of the bespoiled altar, even forgot to kneel down and to look facewards to God. Afterwards, in the vestry, the scandal was still more serious ; voices became loud and words strong. That picture was after all everybody's property, not the priest's alone, for the money with which it had been paid for had been given to the whole church not the parish priest only.

"Either you put it back in its place or we do."

The priest repeated his canonical reasons.

"If something has to be corrected, let the painter get a ladder and do it there on the altar.

In the liveliness of the discussion the peasants finished by calling the picture the "Mistaken Madonna." And then as Don Pietro was silent, bewildered and exhausted by such a day of anxieties, two of them took the picture and without further ado raised it up against its frame and fixed it there by force of blows into the framework. Others lit two candles beneath it and the women stayed to pray before it with a fervor in which rebellion still rankled.

The next morning, shortly before breakfast, Santino walked straight into the priest's house. He was sitting in a red cretonne armchair reading the service and often his eyes wandered and rested on the grating of sunlight that filtered through the green shutter on to the floor. He took off his spectacles and turning pale looked at the terrible donor :

"Ought you not to be coming to-morrow ?"

"I have not been able to wait. I must have your reply to-day."

"Very well. Come down."

They crossed the kitchen where the broth pot was boiling and the cat sleeping, and descended a flight of steps, Don Pietro in front and Santino behind. The stairs were as dark as a well and their footsteps resounded on the wooden boards : only down at the bottom could be seen the keyhole's point of light in the vestry door. Don Pietro, to hear the tread and heavy breathing of the thief, turned round trembling. It seemed to him that he would never get out of that hole alive ; that always in that little bit of life left him he would have to walk there gropingly, in the darkness, spurred on by that deep breathing and that weighty footstep, at his back, always near, getting ever nearer. He managed to open.

The vestry smelt of incense and wax and from a cord hung in one corner dangled the black and white coverlet of the catafalque, for Checchino had begun preparations for the octave of the Dead. Don Pietro would have preferred to wrap himself up in that coverlet on his own account and stay there motionless and wait till they buried him, rather than confess Santino.

But this time Santino had knelt down without need of other exhortations. Don Pietro put his stole round his neck, sat down. He managed to make him say the Confiteor, prompting him word by word. The humility of that great huge man who repeated the prayer with the meekness and hesitations of a boy ended by touching the poor priest. He thought of Saint Philip Neri his patron, miraculous in converting bandits and assassins, and he had almost an impulse of gratitude for that thief who had come just to him, a simple old country priest, to ask to be brought back into the presence of God. He summoned all his strength up so as not to give him absolution straight away with a long penance of prayers and communions. He spoke to him beneath his breath in the confessional manner :

"I have thought a long time, my son, over the seriousness of your sins and the sincerity of your repentance. It is true ; even in the depth of the crime you were anxious to remember

you had been born a Christian, you sought to leave a way open for yourself to eternal salvation. It is true you have compromised me too and have prepared a great deal of trouble and remorse for these few years that are left me to live. But you did it without meaning to, rather you did it with the intention of doing good, and my troubles must not weigh upon you. I have therefore decided to absolve you, but on one condition ; that you reveal to me the names of your victims so that I may ask them, without ever mentioning your name, to give at length to church what you have given without their permission."

Santino was resting his forehead against the wall, his hands lay on the top of the prie-Dieu. Without moving he articulated :

"It is impossible."

"Impossible? But you won't do anything to deserve the divine grace?"

"What has been used for the restoration of the church is now your concern."

"You do not understand me. Only when I have the consent of whoever has suffered the loss will that money belong truly and legitimately to the church. At the moment it does not."

"Don Pietro, it is impossible. Find another penance."

And he did not move, hard as the wall. Don Pietro sighed :

"One is Count Anzilei."

"I have told you nothing."

"Would you have the courage to deny it, here, now?"

"I do not deny it and I do not confirm it."

"Think : by going to Count Anzilei I could perhaps obtain not only the definite gift of those thousand lire for the church but also forgiveness for you."

"Anzilei will arrest you too, the instant he knows you know who has taken the money. Because, yes, it is true, I took six thousand lire from Count Anzilei two years ago. . ."

"At last !"

"But you must not go and speak to him of this fact. You know him as much as I do. Think, Don Piè, of the risk you are run-

ning, you too," and he too spoke in a whisper and, without moving his forehead from the wall, looked sideways at the priest. "Anzilei will refuse. He will denounce you, meanwhile. And your church will lose its good name. This is certain. It is more certain than my arrest. I have another idea. If you give me absolution, I will set myself to work day and night. With your aid we will make good the thousand lire in one year, or in two or three, and we send them back to Anzilei."

Again emotion invaded Don Pietro's heart :

"And do let it be. But tell me the names of the other two.

"When we are freed from this one, I will tell you then."

"No, my son. You must speak now."

"Don Pietro, you torture me."

"It is my duty."

"Then you could have said so, before wringing my secret from me. . ."

He seemed afflicted and hid his face in his hands. Then he lifted a knee as if to go away. Don Pietro thought the inadequacy of his speech and the imprudence of his mind were losing a convert for the Church.

"Stay here. Will you promise to tell me one day, when we have paid Anzilei, the names of the other two?"

"I promise you before God."

Don Pietro yielded. He laid before the penitent a whole long system of fasts and nine days' devotions, rosaries and communions that he must complete within a year, and tracing in the air above his head the sign of the cross with the first and second fingers of his right hand, he murmured with a sigh of relief the "*Ego te absolvo*," and stood up :

"Now go. Begin a new life for yourself. Come to me when you want."

Santino had risen too, he had stamped both feet on the ground as if to unstiffen his legs, he had seized hold of his hat again and turned to look the priest again in the face.

"Now I have to ask you a favour. It is urgent. The police constable at Spoleto must have received some kind of information."

"Information of what?"

"Why, of the Anzilei affair."

"Civil justice does not concern me. When you have finished your penance, divine justice will absolve you."

"Yes, I know. But I told the constable that on Sunday morning, September 25th, 1905, whilst Anzilei's safes were being emptied, I was here at your house settling your accounts, that you saw me all the morning, immediately before and after Mass. From here to Anzilei's villa is an hour's walk. Therefore I am saved."

"But if the constable . . ."

"If the constable questions you, you answer as I tell you. Do you want to ruin me? Do you want to ruin me now?"

"I am not going to swear false oaths."

"You won't have to swear anything. It is only question of a suspicion. The case is two years old, and the constable will be glad to let it drop again. One word from you is sufficient. There's no question of oaths : don't be afraid."

"I shall tell the truth."

"Thank you, Don Pietro ! First you make me pour out everything like a child, first you absolve me then you betray me. This is what men are. Is it worth repenting? Is it worth being honest? Is it worth giving to the church what I've given to it? Very well : I won't say another word. When I'm arrested, I shall confess, confess everything : what I have robbed and what I have given to you. This at least you will not deny."

"But you are mad . . ."

"I shall tell everything. And if you and your church have to suffer for it, it will not be my fault. I came to you, I knelt down, I repented and was absolved. And now do you abandon and betray me? You yourself judge, Don Pietro. When the constable questions you, think of your own chances, speak according to your conscience. Now you know all. I am in your hands. It is done, and it's useless sitting and crying over it."

And he went off towards the stairs.

"Santino, you can't . . . Santino !"

Santino had opened the door, he was ascending the dark staircase.

"Santino !"

Don Pietro ran after him. When he looked out of the window he saw him as he crossed the square, his two hands in his pockets. He sent Checchino to find him at his house in the afternoon. Santino's house was shut up. No one had seen him re-enter it.

Don Pietro stayed in bed two days and the doctor forbade him to read even his breviary. However Checchino's wife, who boiled his broth for him and changed the hot water bottle for his feet, found him in the evening sitting on his bed with the drawer of the bed table open and a pile of papers on his knees, so absorbed in his reading that he did not even answer her. Don Pietro was looking over the accounts of the church restorations, and then in the night, he dreamt of them among the clouds, written in the eternal book of giving and taking which the archangel compiles and the pages of which he turns over at the right hand of the Father, and at his appearance the harmonies of the spheres were silent and the archangel began to read with a voice of thunder : " To the superintendent for mortar and cement 110 lire plus 75 lire for fifty days' labour . . ." And as the terrible readings proceeded, the cloud on which he was seated fell down and down like a balloon collapsing : and beneath was the abyss.

When on Thursday he got up, so weak that he could not take Mass, Lorenzo Taccoli, warden for the Congregation of Our Lady, followed by two brothers, came to bring him a petition, signed by a hundred parishioners, in which he was begged not to take away or to modify the picture of the Madonna of the Rosary "a miraculous image from which innumerable mercies have already been showered upon the believers."

This happened in the morning. Shortly after lunch Don Pietro was resting on the couch when there suddenly appeared to him in the doorway the sergeant of the carabinieri. He often dropped in to see the priest, especially in summer

during the hours of extreme heat to interrupt the weekly exploration with a glass of wine. But in that moment this apparition was to Don Pietro a sentence of death.

The sergeant gave him a smile :

"Don Pietro, at your age one should not sleep after dinner."

"What d'you say ? Eh, What d'you say ? What do you want with me ?"

The sergeant had entered and sat down, Checchino followed him with a bottle of *Vino Santo*, and Don Pietro could not manage to free himself from the nightmare. He had to rise to his feet :

"My boy . . ."

"You were sleeping, eh ? Sleeping after lunch at your age isn't allowed"—he repeated turning his revolver case to the front of his belt as it prevented him from leaning on the back of the chair as he drank.

Don Pietro studied that honest face, with its clean-shaven cheeks and small chestnut beard, divided in two points, and blue eyes. At other times, when the sergeant came to see him, the dear old man felt flattered by it, because that visit meant in the eyes of all the village the meeting and concord of spiritual and terrestrial authority, and he even felt more confident than usual for it seemed impossible to him that thieves could break in where a sergeant had entered. That day, instead, he breathed fast and dared not say the first word. Then he became afraid of his very silence and proffered three syllables :

"Any news ?"

"A motor whisked off the tail of an ox just near the signal box. I haven't got the number and it will be a long business tracing it"—and he explained how one has to formulate an action against cars. He concluded : "They are worse for escaping than thieves."

Don Pietro had another shiver. Checchino went away. The sergeant did not speak until the sacristan's footsteps were heard down the outside stairway beneath the window :

"Don Pietro, I have to ask for some information from you, in secret."

The death sentence appeared.

"Say on, then, say on."

"Do you know Santino, the agent, the one who has been in America?"

"He came here the day before yesterday"—and it seemed to him that the armchair was slowly giving way like the cloud in the dream before the Eternal One.

"All the better. What does he live on, to your mind?"

"Oh well . . . he manages . . . To tell you the truth, I don't really know."

"Is he a good Christian?"

"He confesses . . . occasionally."

"So much the better, so much the better. We have had information from a confidant some time ago, but the confidant is not very reliable."

It was a miracle if Don Pietro did not repeat like an echo the sergeant's "*so much the better*." The latter continued in a low voice, putting down his empty glass and drawing his chair nearer :

"Do you remember the Anzilei theft, two years ago? That spy suspects Santino. He has a clue : Santino went to the villa Anzilei two days before to find the steward for the sale of a pair of oxen, and instead of entering the office he went straight in by the master's door. Why? He knew the two doors very well, he had been in there a thousand times. The police constable summoned him without ceremony. Santino defended himself well : he said that on the morning of the robbery—and he unbuttoned his coat and took out a small note book from a breast pocket—on Sunday morning, September 25th, 1905, he was here with you, in the vicarage settling your accounts. Is that true?"

"Indeed . . ."

"I know, after a space of two years, it is difficult for you to remember an exact date."

"No, rather . . ."

"Sunday, September 25th, 1905. The robbery must have been committed during Mass."

"You are right : It is difficult to remember."

"Take your time, Don Pietro, consult your books . . ."

"Certainly."

"If you find that the date is right, that Santino was here in your house that morning, don't send me anything. If on the other hand you see that at any rate on that day he was certainly not to be seen on your premises, send for me. Next Sunday I am going to Norcia, commanded there, for one or two months. I should like if anything to have your reply first. Without proofs, I shall not arrest him, and I am in concordance with the police constable. Trials that end in examinations through lack of evidence are ruinous to our career."

Shortly after the sergeant left. For the third time, he repeated affectionately :

"And after eating don't go to sleep like that. At your age it's dangerous."

Don Pietro did not succeed in moving for at least an hour after the sergeant had gone. He kept his eyes glued to the door as if expecting the other to return. Then he drank a little of wine and went into the church to pray in front of the Sacrament. Half way down the dark staircase leading down into the vestry, he stopped : he seemed to hear at his back a heavy tread and deep breathing. . .

It was mere imagination. Santino had been seen by no one for many days. Don Pietro, taking a stroll went as far as beneath his house : it was shut up like a tomb. And if he had gone back to America in a fright ? And if he had imprudently left some proof of his crime in there ? And if any enquiry were to establish that Santino himself had cleared old Anzilei's safe ? And that he, Don Pietro, had lied ? The trial, the sentence. A trial at seventy, as an accomplice of a thief ! A well-paid accomplice, for he had received a thousand lire of that theft, cash down . . .

He went all round the cottage. Behind was an orchard, ten yards wide, unkempt and hedgeless, where one solitary rosemary bush prospered and gave forth fragrance among the dog's grass and convolvulus and briers. Besides the bush

there was a pile of bricks, tiles, old plaster works and rusted irons, against the house. Don Pietro's anxious eye marked out a key amongst the scrap iron, so red with rust that between the ring and the key bit the stem was worn to a shred. The key naturally reminded him of the safe and his fear grew stronger : after casting a glance all round, he buried the key again with his foot, carefully, and went back to the road pacified.

He did not trust Checchino. He knew he was jealous of new faces, he felt he disliked Santino and dared not speak of him for fear of hearing suspicions and accusations which he would not have known how to answer.

And he shut himself up in his silence, not being able to shut all the doors and windows of the house. He went down into the church as little as possible. He hastily hurried up the Mass as if the sacred table and vestments burnt him. On week-days as he put on old chasubles, those before the donation, he was calmer and more attentive, but on a Sunday the people came out of church mumbling that Don Pietro had little longer to live and it would be as well to find a priest to help him.

A month thus passed. Don Pietro meditated going to the bishop after the Christmas festival and telling him everything on his knees, ready for any sacrifice. If in the meanwhile Santino were to reappear and announce that he had honestly gleaned some hundred lire for the restitution. . . . He himself, poor as he was, was becoming miserly, he was even stingy over the wine at Mass. He had two hundred lire in silver put aside : the fees for the Masses said outside the parish, for a few offices of the dead. Having found out that with the change in notes he could make a profit that year, he sent them to be changed by the postman at Spoleto, and had the lock renewed in his chest of drawers which in living memory had never known a key.

At last one morning, passing before the public house, he saw Santino again. He stopped short ; but the other, who was sitting talking to two or three peasants, nodded without

moving, half rising and scarcely touching the peak of his cap, as he used to do before his confession. That indifference threw him into a deeper reverie. What was Santino planning? Was he working? Was he endeavouring to collect the money for the restitution as he had so solemnly promised? Was he doing his penance? Where was he doing it, if he had no longer been seen in church? And he often met him, but never dared to question him. Finally he almost became satisfied with this separation, for he seemed to regain a little liberty until the time when he would go and throw himself at the feet of the bishop, bearing in his hand the accounts of the restorations.

* * *

A week before Christmas, when one o'clock at night had scarcely sounded, Checchino set off from the side door of the church into the village. The deserted square shone like a mirror, for a little snow had fallen that morning and first melted in the sun and then froze towards evening with the cold. Quite suddenly he heard coming from the street above the sound of a carriage muffled by the veil of ice, and the irregular beating of the hoofs of a horse who could not manage to advance and slipped about whilst someone urged it and held it up shouting and swearing and cracking his whip. When he arrived under the lamp, the voice called him :

"Hi, you from the church !" and the carriage stopped :
"Come here, for I can't go any further on this glassy street."

The sacristan approached, he recognised the white horse of Anzilei's steward, but within, under the hood of the cab he did not recognise the steward.

"Where is the vicar ?"

"At home."

"Can you call him ? Count Anzilei, the old man, is dying. He must have the priest at once."

"At this hour, with this weather, the priest cannot move. He is old too."

"Go and tell him."

"Go as far as Ponte Nuovo : that vicar is younger."

"No ; I've got to take this up there. I have blankets with me. Get up, we will make him warm."

Checchino walked up to the vicarage out of spirits. That night journey for Don Pietro might mean his death.

"Don Pietro, there's a call. But you must say No."

"A call ? Who is it ?"

"First promise me you will say No. With this cold you mustn't go."

"Who is it ? Answer."

"It's Count Anzilei, that old man, up at the villa . . ."

"Is he dying ?"—and Don Pietro was on his feet. "Answer me, is he dying ?"

"Oh isn't it obvious ? Do you want him to marry at this hour ? He is dying, and he has sent for you. But you mustn't go there."

"I'm going there at once, at once."

"This is what is called killing oneself, do you realise ?"

"I am going at once. Has he sent the beast ?"

"He has sent the steward's gig."

Don Pietro went into his bedroom, moving as quickly as a boy. After a moment he returned with his hat, his coat and woollen scarf.

"Where's the gig ?"

"At the corner of the church. It cannot come forward because the horse keeps sliding on the ice."

"Then I'll go."

He had already opened the door of the stairs. He reshut it with a bang and turned back throwing hat, scarf and coat on the table.

"You felt how cold it is ? I was right, wasn't I ?"

But Don Pietro did not reply. He passed his hand across his brow, staring at the circle of light that the hanging lamp threw upon the table. At length he spoke after throwing a suspicious glance at Checchino :

"Santino, where would he be at this hour ?"

"Santino ? What has Santino got to do with it ?"

"I know. Answer quickly : where ought Santino to be?"

"At the inn. Where'd you think he'd be?"

"Go and call him."

"Are you going to take him too?"

"Go and call him."

"But why? What's he to do with it? Don Pietro, I have told you for some time that you are not well. Don't go up there to-night."

"Go and call Santino. If not, I shall go myself. Is it clear?"

Checchino went out. He returned five minutes later with Santino and found Don Pietro standing in the same attitude, staring at the bright circle beneath the lamp.

"Here is Santino"—and he did not move.

"Good. Now go away. Santino will wait for me."

"Is this what you've called him for?"—and he went off banging one door after another.

Santino took off his hat.

"What do you want at this hour, Don Pietro?"

"Anzilei is dying."

Santino did not move :

"That's natural : he is old."

"He has called me to confess him."

"You will amuse yourself, Don Pietro."

"My son, my son, but is it possible you don't understand?"

"What?"

"You must authorise me to speak of that . . . of that act of yours."

"No."

"At least for that which concerns me . . . for the thousand lire of the church?"

"I should like to know your exact words."

"I shall tell him that the man who took that money from him two years ago, the 25th of October . . ."

"Let us be exact, Don Pietro : September 25th. I don't want any muddles."

"Yes, September 25th. . . . Therefore that the man who stole that money from him, after repenting presented a

thousand lire to this church and without knowing of their origin I used them for what I've used them, that on the point of death I ask him to consign them to me as if he had given them to me himself . . ."

"That would have been a miracle ! Without me you would not have had them."

"Leave pride alone. Listen to me Can I say this to him?"

"Tell him it. But excuse . . ."

A voice from below cried :

"Are you coming?"

"If you made it a condition before giving him absolution that he was to pardon me, and declare to his heirs also that they are not to concern themselves with this deed, not ever, don't you think it would be better, Don Pietro?"

"It does not come into this."

"One thing hangs on another. Either you advise him to give it all over to us or it is useless to disturb him."

"Give it us, give it to us ! You keep talking of you and me together, like that, as if I was in it, in that affair."

"But it's clear, Don Pietro. You owe him one thousand lire, I should owe him the others. Make one business of it, and may God receive him in glory ! Hasn't God forgiven me through your mouth?"

"Are you coming, yes or no?"—the voice repeated down below :—"If not, I'm going to Ponte Nuovo."

"Will you wait for me here?" asked Don Pietro of Santino.

"I'll wait for you here."

Don Pietro took his hat and coat and scarf again, and went down and into the church to get the pyx and the Host inside the theka with the veil. The trap set off. In the open country the road was not frozen like in the square closed in by the houses and the horse trotted along. Half an hour later Don Pietro alighted before the villa : a large white manor among chestnut trees which on three sides tapped the windows with their branches.

All the road below the house and all the space in front was covered with straw to deaden every sound of wheels and foot-

steps. A picture gallery, a billiards-room, an empty drawing-room and a small sitting-room with about ten people talking in low tones in half darkness, and two hunting dogs on the ground stretched out motionless with their noses between their paws : and finally the dying man's room, deep and all in red, lit by a veiled lamp and stifling with the smell of ether, mustard and boiling water. On one side of the bed Don Pietro recognised Anzilei's son, whom he had not seen for years, for he had married in Naples ; and on the other side Doctor Ambrosi from the hospital of Spoleto, an honest giant with white bristling hair, a huge nose, and two commas of a moustache dyed black, as ridiculous as two little false mustachioes beneath a sham nose. Doctor Ambrosi came to meet him, and desired him not to excite the patient but dispense with his confession in a few words :

"At all events what's done, is done," and he went off without a nod, for he was anti-clerical.

The son, a man of fifty years, white-haired and with a large paunch, shook hands with Don Pietro :

"I'll shut the door. As soon as you have finished, call us."

Old Anzilei, bald, with his scanty white beard grown in these few days of illness, had only his eyes and hands alive. His hands, red and shiny like crushed red silk, kept beating nervously with their ten fingers against the sheet thrown back, and his small black eyes rolled round beneath his heavy eyelids searching every dark corner as if trying to detach themselves from that tangle of wrinkles. From time to time his hands stopped, his eyes shut and it seemed as if death had come upon him in peace ; then his restlessness began again as if an invisible hand had wound up again the toy's mechanism.

Don Pietro sat down in the son's place and said a few words of comfort to the old man. The latter, after a few seconds of silence, asked the stupefied priest :

"You, how old are you ?"

"Seventy."

"Then you can understand . . . I am seventy-eight," and

he began again to beat his hands on the sheet and roll his small black eyes. All at once by a supreme effort his eyes became fixed on those of the priest and the dying man began to speak in the mere ghost of a voice. He must have been saying words which he had prepared, for every now and then he interrupted and corrected himself. He described his faults more than he told of his sins : avarice, severity, his immoderate desires. At the end he stopped short and remained still.

Don Pietro thought to ask him that grace before absolving him, but it seemed to him it would be ungenerous, almost a blackmail ; and so he hurriedly absolved him, without a break, and after the Latin words continued to speak close to him in a tremulous voice :

"And now you too must absolve me. Do you remember the robbery which was committed here against you two years ago, one Sunday, when you were at Mass ? That wretched man who did the theft repented, and came to confess to me, having the same trust that you now have in Our Saviour's mercy. But before confessing, he left a part of the stolen money in the poor box in the church ; and we of the church, thinking it to be a legitimate donation, used it for the embellishment of God's House. Perhaps Our Lord himself has forgiven us, for He has led the thief himself to the altar of penitence. In this solemn moment, I ask you, as the good Christian you are, to forgive that man."

"He came to confess ? And confessed all to you ? To you ? He confessed on his own ? Wasn't he afraid that then you . . . ?"

"We have two duties : forgiveness and silence."

"And you will never reveal . . . ?"

"Never, I would die first."

The old man was silent. Don Pietro urged him, frightened to see him lying so still :

"Yes, yes, I forgive him, I forgive him ! I forgive everyone. Will Our Lord be pleased with me for this ? You must know. He ought to be glad."

"The Saviour hears us," said Don Pietro simply. Then, satisfied at having obtained what he wanted, he turned to open the door.

"I shall recall your son now for the Communion."

But he had scarcely taken four steps when the old man shook himself and sought some kind of hold for his hands as if he wished to sit up. He called :

"Come here, come here ! Don't call anyone. Hear me, hear me !"

Don Pietro had returned to his side.

"Listen to me, hear everything. I did not tell you everything, I have never told everything. I too am a thief, I too have stolen. The millions I have, I too began by stealing them. Don't tell anyone anything. You alone will know. At thirty, I too stole, yes, I robbed and robbed and robbed"—and he repeated the words, beating out the syllable with his hands on the sheet.

"You don't believe me ? It is exactly as I say ; robbed. I suppressed a relation's will and inherited thirty thousand lire, only thirty thousand lire. And with that I've made everything. All the rest I've made with my own hands : yes, this is true. But those thirty thousand lire, I too, I too stole them. And now go in there, call the others, I want to free myself from this weight, I want to do as that other did who robbed me. I want that sum to go to you, that you do what you want with it so that the Saviour may forgive me, now, forgive me at once. Go there, call the witnesses . . . two witnesses are necessary. . . ."

Don Pietro had listened open-mouthed. He could think of nothing but to obey, automatically. He opened the door and son and doctor re-entered and went to the bedside. The dying man addressed his son :

"Not you. The doctor and someone else . . . someone who isn't a relation . . . who is there ?"

They named one or two people. He repeated :

"Someone who isn't a relation,"—and he eyed his son suspiciously.

They had the steward brought, and the old man called him to his side near the doctor.

"You are witnesses that I charge my heirs to give thirty thousand lire, do you understand? thirty thousand lire in ready money to Don Pietro, what is he called? to Don Pietro Caprani here present as my legatee, of my own free will so that he may use it for the purpose he knows"—and he fell back upon the bed.

His son pushed Don Pietro into a corner :

"What tricks are these?"

Don Pietro was trembling all over :

"But I didn't say anything. I didn't ask for anything. He isn't leaving them to me. What can I do?"

"It is an indignity, do you hear? An indignity to take advantage of a man in that state!"

Don Pietro's honesty was roused :

"You do not know with whom you are talking. I have never taken anything from anyone. I was called, and I have come. I have done my duty : now I am going"—and with his head high he returned to the bed, knelt down and prayed for a minute in silence, then covered his shoulders with the silk veil, drew the Host from the pyx, made the sign of the cross over the moribund and pressed it through his breathless lips. And when the prayers were over, he shut the pyx again, in the theka, after folding up the veil and went out without a word or sign to anyone.

But on the road, excited by a fever, he was unable to connect his ideas.

He alighted from the gig in the square and began to climb the vicarage steps. A voice from the darkness of the orchard said :

"I am here. Come up."

It was Santino.

"Why are you there?"

"I did not know what might be the end of it . . . I wanted to see if you came back alone."

They went into the dining-room, into the warm. Don Pietro

threw his hat on to the table, rested the sacred theka there and dropped into the armchair, his head in his hands and his elbows on his knees and began to weep. Santino let him cry a little, then asked with indifference :

"Do you want anything else ? I am going."

"Do I want anything else indeed ?"—and he lifted his arms with a haggard look. "And you don't ask me anything ? You don't ask what he said for you, that one up there ?"

"For me ? What does he know of me ?"

"Anzilei pardons you, Anzilei has left me the thousand lire that you gave me for the church."

"That is natural. . . ."

"But that is not enough : Anzilei has left through me to my church thirty thousand lire, do you understand ? Thirty thousand lire."

"Thirty thousand lire ?"

Even Santino seemed struck by the importance of that amount. He took two steps forward as if drawn by a magnet.

"Have you got them on you ?"

"No. He called two witnesses, the doctor and the steward, and before them bequeathed me this legacy."

"It will take time exacting it. You will have trouble with it. The relations will perhaps be in opposition . . . If you do get them, what will you do with them ?"

"What shall I do with them ? First of all I shall repay the two thousand lire to the two others you are going to tell me."

"I shan't tell you anything."

"Not even now ?"

"I have told you : I am working to put aside that sum myself."

"My son, these words comfort me, but there must be no question of pride now. I am helping you now. When you have got them, you will restore them to me. In the meanwhile let us be rid of this nightmare."

"But they are not dying like Anzilei, the other two. The restitution will excite suspicion, I shall be followed up, arrested. . . . You would now cut a good figure, you would

have restored everything. But I? Don Pietro, you are a just man. These thirty thousand lire you owe to me. Without me you would not have had them. Anzilei was not a man to give away so many notes of a thousand, not even on the point of death," and Santino whose eyes were fastened on the priest's, drew closer and closer and ended in whispering six inches off his face :

"If he is giving them to you, it is a sign that they are not his."

"What do you suspect?"

"That when you spoke of my confession and repentance his remorse came out. Without me, he would have been remorseless and you moneyless. That's clear."

"But it's not at all clear!"

"Swear to me I'm wrong, swear it on the Sacrament."

"I'm not going to swear anything."

"All right : it is useless that you should swear. I repeat : without me, he would have gone to hell and you would have been left with empty pockets. In what way is Anzilei better than I? He, rich in millions, gave you thirty thousand lire, I, as poor as a church mouse, gave you three thousand. This difference rests on the stupidity of justice, not on me nor on him. Didn't things go well with him? They will go well with me another time ; but I didn't wait till death to repent and give an offering to God.

"That's true."

"And now you want with that money which you owe me just as much as the others to repay your little two thousand lire to Mr. So-and-so and Mr. Such-and-such and leave me in the lurch? Nothing of the sort! I'm not telling the names."

"But think, my son, both your debt towards them and your debt towards God will diminish in proportion."

"Double my penance, but I won't say. And I thank you for your gratitude!"

"Gratitude?"

"How many times have I to tell you, Don Pietro? You owe

me that money to-day, as you owed the restoration of the church to me yesterday. Without me, you and your church would still be the same as you were three years ago : that is nothing, absolutely nothing. A church poor and dirty, a poor unknown parish priest. An honest man, Don Pietro, I don't deny. But, after all, who has been the most helpful to your church ? The honest man that you are, or the thief that I am ?”

Don Pietro continued to stare at him, hypnotised. He nodded two or three times with his head and concluded :

“It is true. The ways of the Lord are unknown.”

“They may be unknown at other times, but this time they are most plain”—Santino boldly retorted, and as if, after perceiving so clearly the divine will he were the more easily able to see what was his own, he added gently : “Suppose we do this. Of the thirty thousand lire which Anzilei's heirs will publicly and legally assign to you, you can take three thousand lire and repay them to me.”

“Repay ?”

“Didn't I give them to you ?”

“But they weren't yours.”

“And Anzilei's thirty thousand, are they his ?”

“Oh, oh . . . You want to drive me mad !”

“I want to get you to bed for you're dead tired. If you could see your face, you would pay attention to me ; you give me the three thousand lire and have no more remorse pangs. . . .”

“I ?”

“Yes, you. Didn't you tell me in confession that you were ashamed of having honoured Our Lord and done up the church with stolen money ? You give it back to me and you reckon to have paid all the work done in the church with Anzilei's money. His seems to you to be cleaner : use his. Give me back mine which seems to you to be soiled. No one but you, I and the Saviour will know.”

And as the petroleum lamp was burning low, he put it out and lit a candle end and went into the kitchen to refill it.

He returned, helped Don Pietro to rise, escorted him to his bedroom and bade him good-night.

A month later, when the legacy had been extracted from the Anzileis, Don Pietro, to set his mind at rest, gave Santino his three thousand and with the other twenty-seven made of his church the most elegantly adorned and most esteemed house of worship in the district below Spoleto. And from this the faith and eternal welfare of his parishioners gained considerable advantage.

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GRAZIA DELEDDA

(1875-)



(I)

THE OPEN DOOR

(Translated by Miss E. M. BAKER)

ON holy Wednesday Simon Barca went to confession. He was, desperate, and a desperate man is glad to remember God, as an ill man the doctor.

So Simon went to the Basilica, a national monument which still lends a richness to the once prosperous countryside, and where at that hour of the morning, only a few monks from the nearby monastery were celebrating Mass, in chapels where the damp had spread a green film over the ancient frescoes. The peasant women, with hoods over their heads and coarse skirts swathed tightly round them and laced up with thin silver chains, were singing the Rosary in their Latin dialect : their voices faded away in the airy depths of the Basilica as amongst the ruins of a temple ; through the wide open doors a wild fragrance of spurge and budding alder trees wafted in from the valley. Simon went to confess himself to the prior, who filled the little confessional with his huge body, snoring and puffing away in there like a bear in a cage.

"Father, I'm a lost man : I want to kill some fellow Christian, I feel so desperate. I have committed the worst sins. Until a little time ago I was the dutiful son of a family, the only son, Father. At twenty I still slept with my mother ; but she was hardly dead when bad companions gathered

round me like flies round a raisin pip ; and my uncle, priest though he is, turned me out of the house instead of helping me, and now when he sees me he looks the other way. Yes, I have committed the very worst sins : I have gambled, drunk, gone with bad women, consulted witches, blasphemed, wished my neighbour ill, coveted others' belongings, committed . . . forgery . . . yes, Father . . . I forged a signature, and the bill of exchange falls due in a few days . . . and I shall have to go to prison and I shall be dishonoured. . . . It is all the fault of bad companions, and they have deserted me now : and every door is closed against me . . . there is not one open door, now, for me ! But I'm repentant, Father, and will go to prison and atone, but give me the good Lord's absolution, so that I may fulfil the Easter duties and suffer innocent like Christ our Saviour."

The prior wheezed on and made no answer. Simon, his thin, dark rogue's face in his hands, breathed hard too, and thought :

" Perhaps he's scandalised : perhaps he is pleased to hear that the real cause of my ruin is my uncle Barca the priest. Monks and priests can't bear the sight of each other. Perhaps, to spite my uncle, he'll give me the money to pay the bill."

But the prior snored and said nothing : his warm breath blew on Simon's face. Tired of waiting, the penitent roused himself from his dream of expiation and his malicious thoughts ; his big eyes, dark and childish, contracted, and a bitter smile deepened the hollows in his shaven cheeks. The prior was asleep. Ah, even God is deaf to the cries of a despairing sinner.

* * *

Simon stole away very quietly, his heart sad, his mind a ferment of ugly thoughts. The proceedings of the day were starting round the great altar, and the priest Barca's mobile voice could already be heard chanting with trills and shakes. People were coming and going : now men were arriving too ; they were tall, with long square beards as in Moses' time,

dressed in leather jackets and short serge trousers, full like skirts. Some seemed like prophets, they were so solemn, calm and unaffected ; others were small, lean as our Simon, hardened by the wind and by evil thoughts.

The women, too, recalled those in the Bible. Simon met one in the court of the Basilica, a tall dry widow, with an olive face and huge greenish eyes, swathed in her almost priestly clothes as in a black sheath, and she only wanted a bunch of ears of corn to be a second mother-in-law of Boaz. Simon shuddered when he saw her ; he shuddered with hatred, for the woman was a kind of housekeeper for Barca, and he shuddered at the sudden thought that at that moment there was no one in his uncle's house : and as if night had suddenly fallen, he began to see things and people in a mist, and he stalked along by the walls, stumbling against the stones which lay about the rough roads. So he found himself before his house, like a surviving bit of a tower, and only then the light seemed to flood back all round him.

He went in, and soon after, at the little window of the first and only storey, his face appeared, pensive as that of a general forming a plan of battle from the height of a fortress. Simon's field of battle was the limited picture spread beneath him : it consisted of the country road crossed by a stream, where rushes and grass grew as in open country ; the widow's little house opposite his ; the big, dark house of his uncle the priest, and its yard, beside the widow's, shut in by a little chapel with a kitchen garden so overgrown with weeds and shaded by cypress trees that it seemed the corner of a cemetery. Simon thought how he had spent his childhood and his youth jumping the wall between his uncle's yard and the chapel's garden ; he wondered if the time had come for repeating the feat, only the other way about, from the church garden into his uncle's yard. No one else was so familiar with the hidden corners, the passages, the twistings and turnings.

He shut his eyes, and saw the jutting out piece of the ground floor wall where the priest Barca used to put the big key of his room before going out ; he opened them again, and,

agitated, remembered that vast, rather mysterious room, lighted by a tiny lamp, filled with sacred images and bound books. Here, as a child, he had more than once surprised his uncle, in shirt and skull-cap, counting over gold pieces like a wizard, or skilfully piercing his name on bank-notes with a pin. One day, crawling on the floor, crouching down to imitate a wild-boar, Simon had moved one of the floor blocks, and under it had found a box full of money. Now he recalled those times as a prisoner remembers his days of freedom . . .

For three days he remained almost continually at the window, only leaving it to eat a mouthful of rye bread and some goat's cheese. Yes, while his uncle stored his money under the floor-blocks, he had to live like a poor shepherd ; his house was empty, deserted, without furniture (he had sold it), even without doors (sold as well), and the spiders spun their webs over the rough boar's skin trunk in which he kept his poor mother's wedding dress and widow's weeds.

To console himself he would drink a small glass of brandy and go back to the window.

From below he smelt the fragrance of the cakes the women were getting ready for Easter, and he saw the smoke rise from wood or tiled roofs. Already a nightingale was singing in the valley, and the fluffy April clouds floated by over the chapel garden, white as bits of girls' clothing blown off some hedge by the wind.

On Holy Thursday the widow left his uncle's house and opened the chapel, usually closed. Helped by the other women of the neighbourhood she pulled down the Christ, laid it on the ground between four lights and four dishes of sprouting corn, and so formed the Sepulchre. But everyone was going to the Basilica, where they were celebrating the Passion and two real thieves (at least they had once been condemned for theft) were tied to the cross beside Christ. From his window Simon saw his uncle himself, short, fat, prancing, and the tall widow, dry and stiff, walk one after the other towards the Basilica. He went down, but once in the street he lent his shoulder against the wall and stood for

a long time motionless and pensive, listening to the far-off chanting of the procession. It was dusk ; the new moon was sinking behind the violet tinted hills, in a greenish sky, and the evening star was rising, and seemed as if it would come along the streets of the village like Mary and Christ.

"In a few moments the procession will be here," thought Simon, and moved ; but he walked close by the wall ; he was afraid of going through the chapel to get into the garden, and of going past the dead Christ stretched on the floor between the lights and the corn shoots.

Suddenly, coming to his uncle's door, he shivered. The door was open ; someone must be in the house and it was useless to go on. He turned back and once more leant against the wall. But who could be in his uncle's house ? The servants, peasants and shepherds, only came back on Saturday evening ; the priest and the widow were in the procession. He went forward again to the door, knocked, called : "Basila ! Basila !"

His voice lost itself inside the already dark house as in a cave. He went in, closed the door, flung himself up the stairs, traversed the narrow passages, found the jutting-out wall, found the key, opened, and was in his uncle's room. He seemed to be in a dream. The window was shut ; a light like those round the dead Christ was burning before the picture of the Holy Martyrs. There was a crowd of them, men, women, old people, children, but all looking up with gentle faces, and Simon was not afraid of them. By the greenish glow of the light he bent and began to feel the floor blocks one by one, like a bricklayer with the job of mending the floor ; but not one of the bricks moved, and he stood up and passed his hand across his forehead, wet with cold sweat.

The chanting of the procession reached his ears, and he shivered all over. He leant against his uncle's old bed, and the bed moved aside, creaking and shaking as if seized by the robber's own terror and perturbation. Then Simon looked at the block under the foot of the bed, and it seemed to him that it moved : he bent and pulled it up with his nails,

and in the space beneath, buried in the dust, he found an iron box with two thousand lire notes in it.

* * *

On Easter Day Barca the priest discharged the widow Basila, and immediately scandalous tales spread over the whole country. It was common knowledge that Barca had lost many thousand lire, some said two, some three, some twenty ; and that Basila had forgotten and left his house door open on Good Friday. The police officer went to the priest's house ; but the priest tried to appear unconcerned, clapped his hands and said :

“Trifles ! miserable trifles !”

On Tuesday the widow's little house was searched with care, and she was arrested and set free again the next day. There was no evidence against her ; but the inhabitants or rather the families in the district split into two parties ; the men defended Basila saying that perhaps she had really forgotten the open door, so making it easy for any thief to go in ; the women sneered : “And in a few short minutes the robber made himself at home and helped himself?”

Finally people stopped this talk ; but the widow was looked down on by everyone. She was given no more work ; she stopped going to church and lived in poverty in her wretched house. Simon used to see her, always upright on the threshold, her face pale and sad, but her great greenish eyes turned upwards like those of the Holy Martyrs.

* * *

Simon paid the false bill of exchange and bought back his doors and his cloak. No one was surprised, for like every gambler, he often had these ups and downs of fortune, and only his creditor knew about the bill. What astonished everyone was to see him suddenly change his way of living. He stopped going with bad women and gave up his disreputable companions, he went to church and nodded to his uncle. But his uncle persisted in turning away when he saw him, and one day when Simon went up to him determined to stop him

and kiss his hand, he not only ignored his greeting but literally turned his back on him.

Simon stood petrified. He leant against the wall and remained fixed there, overcome by a terrible thought.

"He knows !"

Then he went to the widow Basila and said to her :

"Do you think you could bake, and wash, and mend my clothes for me ? Fix your own wage."

The widow was standing up before a dead fire combing her hair ; it was thick and very long, of a golden chestnut colour, and made a halo of martyrdom round her olive face ; but when she saw Simon she covered her cheeks and breast with it like a veil, and shook her head in a threatening way, whilst her greenish eyes flashed beneath her knitted eyebrows, thick and black.

"You have someone already to bake and wash for you ! Get out of here !"

He went like a whipped dog and leant against his wall again.

"She knows !"

He spent the days in this way, leaning against the wall, often whittling with a little knife at his walnut stick, or some plug or straw, but more often doing nothing at all. Never before, even at his worst times, had he lived so aimlessly. He was haunted by the widow's threatening eyes, and felt an almost physical ill when he thought that Basila had fallen into poverty and ill-repute through his fault ; some nights he had fearsome dreams ; the trunk with his mother's clothes in it seemed a live boar, and fixed staring eyes on the doors bought back with that money.

The summer passed, and in the autumn he moved his seat along the wall, seeking the sun. From the new place he saw the widow Basila more clearly, seated too in the sun spinning or sewing, barefooted, and sad as a slave.

The winter was long and severe. The poor people suffered much from hunger, and Barca and a lady who lived in the neighbourhood sent bread and vegetables to all the needy except the widow. For Christmas a lady with whom Simon

had often wandered about, sent him a present of a ram's leg. He already had a little pig and a lamb : and thinking that Basila had nothing but potatoes, sent her the ram's leg, and to his astonishment found that she did not refuse the gift. Then all the rest of the winter, seized by a mania for expiation, he went on sending her gifts, often depriving himself of some real necessity.

Spring came again : once more the women put bowls of corn to sprout in cupboards, to adorn the sepulchres. Holy Friday evening Simon went to the procession and afterwards stood for some time in the usual spot, beside the wall, in the warm, whisper-filled evening. A yellowish glow was coming from the crack of Basila's door, and Simon stared with queer eyes at that light which seemed mysterious to him. Suddenly he went and knocked and asked the woman if she would marry him.

* * *

People talked, then stopped talking, After all, Basila was only ten years older than Simon, and a good housewife : indeed, before long the young man's house was transformed, clean, with the stove always alight and the little yard swarming with fowls. Simon was seen on a horse again, as in the time when his mother was alive ; they all said that he had married Basila to spite his uncle.

He was not in love with his wife, but he followed her advice and was glad at having lifted a weight off his conscience, and married a wise woman. The latter went to church again and talked in a brief manner, and it seemed to Simon that he had gone back to the happy times with his mother when he, still innocent at twenty, went to bed with her and repeated the prayers she suggested to him.

One day, several months after his marriage, the woman who had sent him the ram's leg called him as he was passing by her door, and asked him to lend her a hundred crowns.

He began to laugh : "If I had a hundred crowns I should set out to go round the world."

"I'll pay you the interest, Simon Barca ! I can pay ; I'll give you twenty per cent. like the others."

"You are going mad, Mallena Porceu !"

"What, mad ? Tell me you don't trust me, Simon Barca, but don't insult me. You and your wife have lent money for interest, at twenty per cent., to certain people. Why can't you give me some too ? Or is it true what your uncle Barca says ? That your wife gives the money without you knowing?"

Simon grew pale, but answered :

"My uncle's in his second childhood, and you're what you are !"

The following days he was seen again leaning against the wall, as in his dark times. He was asking himself ceaselessly : "Why was the door open ?" and his brain was toiling and toiling, digging down deep into a black chasm, seeking the truth as the miner seeks gold in the bowels of the earth.

"She must have taken a good part of the money, and left the door open to make people think some robber had gone in. Oh, the sly old cat ! . . ." he thought furiously. But before believing his own idea he wanted to make sure with his eyes themselves.

Again it was Good Friday evening, and Basila had gone to church. Simon waited for that time so as to be free to search the whole house ; but hunt as he might, in drawers, in lockers, in the mattresses, he found nothing.

He looked round, tired of searching and in the half-light the trunk which still contained his mother's clothes seemed again like a live boar. He tried to open it, but could not. Then he remembered that Basila always kept the key with her. He went down to the kitchen, came back with an axe and began to strike at the trunk as if it were really a fierce boar. The lid came open. Simon knelt down and began to search ; he found Basila's widow's clothes, and out of her black hood fluttered, silently, two, three, many bank-notes, red, green, yellowish, like withered walnut leaves. Amongst the others was one of a thousand : he took it up, held it against the

candle light and read Barca's name pierced on it with a pin. Then he began to curse and batter his head.

"But why did it happen to me? why me of all people?" he cried aloud.

Suddenly a sad, sweet song like a murmuring wood floated in from the road. Simon grew quiet and stood listening, his head bent and his eyes wide open, and as the procession approached, he shook and sweated as when he had lent against his uncle's old bed.

(From "Chiaroscuro." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

EASTER

(Translated by —)

ON the morning of Easter Eve, Apollonia Fara sprang out of her big wooden tester bed as soon as the dawn began to cast a pale reflection on the small single pane of her window. A single pane of rough glass, but marvellous for the little picture which it disclosed: a countryside which in the clear and almost colourless freshness of the awakening spring might have been painted by Poussin: a hillside, a winding blue stream, and rare picturesque trees whose branches green with moss were beginning to adorn themselves with tender young leaves: and grass, everywhere grass, short bright grass which caused the spectator an impression of purity and innocence. While she put on her red and yellow dress, Apollonia observed the sky through the window, then went to look at a sack entwined with asphodel: it was full of flour raised the evening before, on the surface of which she had marked the Holy Cross with her finger. The flour had risen a little around this symbol of rejoicing.

The young woman took the sack in her strong white arms and carried it into the adjoining kitchen; she kneaded the flour, then lit the oven and prepared coffee. As the day be-

came warmer, brightening to pink, Apollonia felt some trepidation when she thought : He will come at eight, perhaps at nine, perhaps later, perhaps to-morrow. Oh Jesus, dear Jesus! Well, I will not even think of it, let him come when it pleases him.

But in spite of herself she returned again and again to this thought. The man whose coming she expected and feared was the young curate whose duty it was to visit the houses of the neighbourhood for the Easter benediction. A few years previously this young curate had been engaged to marry Apollonia, but she had left him for a rich farmer. The young man, who was madly in love with her, had attempted suicide, and had shot himself through the body : his life had been saved with difficulty, and now he had become a priest. Recently he had returned to the neighbourhood as curate and every time he saw Apollonia he paled slightly. She herself considered him with perfect indifference, but that morning she felt some uneasiness at the thought that he would be coming to her house to bless her bread and the bed which was as yet unfruitful : and she was perturbed when, opening the window to watch the procession chanting as it passed, she saw the thin frightened face of the curate. She continued to watch, however. The procession was headed by a dark Madonna who, with seven swords piercing her heart, was in search of her dead Son : there followed the standard of green brocade, then came the country musicians and the women clad in mourning. When the procession had completely disappeared at the end of the country road, Apollonia returned to her oven and the kneading of her flour, and she made her wonderful white Easter bread, cut and hollowed out into all sorts of shapes ; and *casadinas*, little cakes of flour and fresh cheese coloured with saffron, and certain little figures, swaddled babies, mummies, or birds, whose heads were big hard-boiled eggs. Complete silence reigned in the deserted house and over the sunny country-side : the bells were mute, "tied up" for the death of Our Lord, and every object joined in this silence as though in expectation of some hidden event : only the birds

sometimes began singing in the hedges but soon ceased as if awed by the silence which they had broken.

The hours went by but the curate did not come. Towards ten o'clock Apollonia seemed to feel a shudder pass through the air, she started and raised her head, listening. The bells were beginning. At once, across their pealing, one, two, five, ten, a hundred shots rang out. Voices of people shouting and half mad with joy accompanied the ringing of the bells and the crack crack of the shots, echoed by the hill opposite. Groups of children passed through the village singing :

“God lives, despite the Jew.”

Tears of a mystical joy dimmed Apollonia's eyes. She finished baking her bread and her cakes for Easter : and in the afternoon with her relations, neighbours and friends she gave and received presents of bread and sweets and meat. At each new present she took pleasure in comparing the bread she had received with what she had made herself and was delighted to find her own whiter and better made. Towards evening her husband returned from the fold, on his strong white horse with his bag full of dairy stuff and two lambs, one black, one white, for the Easter dinner. Apollonia's husband was rich, but like all rich husbands who marry needy girls he was old and ugly : of his yellowish face only the nose and parts of the forehead and cheeks emerged through the dark fog of his untidy hair and beard. Easter rejoicings began on the Saturday evening : the rich farmer invited to his house relations, neighbours and friends, and everyone sang, improvising hymns of gladness in honour of Our Risen Lord. In the intervals they ate Apollonia's cakes and drank wine, absinthe or brandy. It is unnecessary to state that everyone got drunk, to spite the Jews who nailed Our Lord upon the Cross.

The next morning Apollonia rose at dawn as before, because she had to prepare for the Easter dinner at noon. As the sun rose above the hill, the young woman was again disturbed at the thought of the curate's visit. Ah ! to-day he will come, without doubt he will come ! Apollonia knows that he too has

risen at dawn and, clad in his sacred vestments, followed by a man with a bag and a boy with a pail of holy water, is accomplishing the visits which he could not attend to yesterday. At every house the women put bread and cakes and dried fruits in the bag, eggs and money in the pail.

He reached Apollonia's house at about nine : the man with the bag was bent double under the weight of the presents received and the boy with his pail nearly full of eggs and money seemed as if he had drawn his water from some miraculous well. The priest entered Apollonia's house without asking leave and for the first time since he had begun to see the young woman again, he did not turn pale while she did. Oh ! would he bless or curse the house where she was living happily, she who had led him to the very threshold of death ? She asked herself this question with a kind of terror, for in the small Sardinian villages it is believed that priests can curse and excommunicate most effectively with the aid of the sacred volumes. But it was enough for Apollonia to see the inspired face of the priest and the gentle gesture with which he took hold of his shining aspersion and sprinkled the holy water here and there, above and around. She was convinced that his benedictions came from the heart. Then she opened the door into the store room, he blessed the bread, cakes, corn, cheese, vegetables. Apollonia crammed the bag with two large loaves, five cakes and a string of dried figs : then returned to the kitchen with the priest and timidly opened the door leading into her bedroom. A bright golden light entered through the small window. With bated breath, pale and silent, Apollonia watched the priest. Ah !—his face too had become somewhat white : but his hand with a suave gesture blessed the nuptial bed, promising fruitfulness.

Then Apollonia threw her offering into the pail and with it a tear fell into the holy water, forming a little ring within the big one made by the money.

(From "I Giuochi delta Vila." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(III)

A ROMANTIC STORY

(Translated by D'ESTERRE-STAHLE)

Silent and starry the night is,
 Full of the sweetness of story ;
 Why have I not what my right is ?—
 Dreams full of love and of glory.
 Why are they happy below me—
 Sleeping beloved, while I quiver ?
 Why in the night do they show me
 Death is of bliss the one giver ?

A SMALL brown soldier was approaching the big gate of the barracks, singing these verses, to the music of an air from *Sonnambula*. But, in spite of himself, Serafino turned round in surprise, because at that moment he was contemplating suicide—which moreover often happened to him. It must be added at once that this idea—only terrible to those who never will kill themselves—was in Serafino's case a sort of relief.

"Why live ?" he thought. "I am twenty years old, am poor, anæmic and unhappy. I have neither talent, nor will, nor fortune. I once wrote a novel but the paper to which I sent it returned it to me without a word. I have never even had the satisfaction of owning a handsome black suit. My family is so poor that they had to make enormous sacrifices in order to allow me to attend the normal school. Now I am a master and when I have finished my military service I might expect to have a 'brilliant future.' And then we die !"

He said this '*And then we die !*' to himself, much as you would say, "And then I am going away," when you are leaving a place that has become tedious.

Though he was not ambitious and not proud—our Serafino—but kind and gentle like one of those cats that have been maltreated by cruel children, he still had one last dream—to

be able to perform some fine, courageous action before he died, or at least to give an appearance of heroism to his voluntary death.

He dreamt of falling in love with a rich and beautiful lady, or with a great artist who was married and straight. These ladies loved him in return, but every kind of obstacle sprang up between them. And so he would commit suicide. He would have been content to fall in love with these ladies, even though they did not return his passion, for the sake of giving his suicide the appearance of a love tragedy. But where should he find them ?

The thing that oppressed him most with melancholy was the certainty that his poetical dreams would never be realised—the fate of the poor only permits of death by starvation or despair.

* * *

This evening he was passing through one of those periods of sentimental sadness during which thoughts of death are like the sweet dreams of convalescence—long and deep, in a night that has no dawn.

The place in which he had now spent a week was such as could only increase his sadness ; it was a barracks on a mountain island, on the summit of which the white house of the convict prison dominated the pearly distance of one of the most beautiful seas in the world—just as the thought of death dominated his own youth. Moreover the autumn evening, limpid and clear, made everything sad ; and even the deserted sea—all blue and gold in the luminous evening light—shuddered with cold.

The rustle of reeds and acacias, shaken by the wind along the embankments of the island, could be heard as far as the courtyard of the barracks, and nothing could be sadder than this whispered lament. The soldiers collected in the vast courtyard, in front of the low white barracks—which had the appearance of a village—were all affected, more or less, by the melancholy and home-sickness of the autumn winds, for they sang long and dreary songs.

From the great gate Serafino dominated the descending road—paved, and bordered by two walls, at the bottom of which was an open door and the yellowish interior of a deserted inn. An old priest, with a fat, white face resting on his chest, was climbing the steep road, breathing heavily, and holding up his cassock. Having reached the gate he paused and said "Good evening ! Is the Director up here ?"

"Yes, sir," said the little brown soldier, lifting his hand to his forehead.

"One of the prisoners is in the death agony, I believe ? How is that ? This morning all were well."

"Yes, sir. A paralytic stroke."

"Good evening !" said the old priest, and resumed his hurried climb, lifting his cassock a bit higher above his blue socks.

Serafino and his companion—a frenzied music student—started a discussion as they often did. Serafino put this question : "Why the convicts condemned to long imprisonment and suffering from incurable disease did not understand that they *ought* to commit suicide ?"

The music maniac answered that both one and the other lived in hope of ending the imprisonment and curing the disease.

"What do you want ? Life is beautiful," he said in conclusion, his great black eyes flashing with joy. "To live is to conquer ! And you know the more one is ill, and the more one is condemned to hard labour, the more one loves life."

"Words ! Life without health, without freedom, without wealth is Victory with a broken wing," said Serafino, poetically.

"I have poor health," retorted the other, "have been rooted up, and now I am obliged to do military service—and yet I am content. It is worse for those who are not."

"You have no feeling !"

A raucous voice like the scream of a cock broke in upon the discussion :

"Abate !"

"Present !"

It was the sergeant beginning the roll call.

The evening drew in quickly. In the west the sky assumed a steely splendour and between the trembling framework of the acacias the violet sea seemed to shine with its own light.

A lamp flickered at the bottom of the road in the interior of the inn. For the moment the wind had dropped, and the voices of the soldiers answering to the roll call vibrated more loudly—some fresh and gay, some bitter and ironical. The music maniac spoke his "present" with a falling cadence, and Serafino's voice sounded far away as if the wind had carried it with the sighs of the reeds and olives.

After the roll call, the soldiers resumed their singing, and something of annoyance vibrated through their rude and almost savage songs. It would seem as if they wanted to forget—by shouting—their sadness and indignation at finding themselves in this place of punishment. Those who shouted most loudly were the soldiers who had to mount guard during the night over the coastline of the island. Only one was silent—Serafino.

* * *

Towards midnight he found himself on guard at a spot where the road—hitherto closed in by encompassing walls, suddenly opened out upon a great cliff falling precipitously to the sea.

The wind had dropped, but in the starry night the cool air, perfumed by the sea, brought remembrance of the fine nights of spring. The green light of the lantern, which watched like a malign eye over the convict island, threw an enormous fan of vitreous light over the dark sea.

Beneath the rock Serafino saw a fantastic picture—a dark boat lighted up by acetylene, and in the boat an oyster fisher (one of those with a special permit to approach the island), his lean body covered by a red garment, he looked like some fiend in a magic circle of crude light.

Nothing else but the far distant lights on the extremities of the dark land, and the stars in the dark sky.

As always, when he mounted guard, Serafino, who had read

Tolstoi, asked himself bitterly who obliged him to do this, why he had to obey an illogical, monstrous power, represented by men inferior to himself—a peasant corporal, a barber sergeant, who set him to keep watch—unconscious and malign—like the eye of the lantern over a precipice against which the waves beat vainly.

Why should he be deprived of sleep—the only comfort which fate accorded him easily—to guard the tomb of living men who had never done him any harm? And who knew this? It was the same monstrous and illogical power that forced him to live a life without love and without grief, the days of which, like the waves below, came beating uselessly against the rock of nothingness.

The fisherman guided his boat around the rock, and all was darkness again—an azure darkness scarcely broken by the light from the lantern and the distant reflexions.

Serafino was sleepy; his sad thoughts rocked him strangely; even, always even, monotonous and somnolent, like the murmur of the waves. He pondered again the verses of the suicide, repeating them to himself to the music of *Sonnambula*.

They seemed to have been made on purpose for him—those verses; the sweet and facile music reminded him of the old airs that had accompanied his first dreams as a student.

The night now was still and starry, but no longer happy with dreams. One dream alone broke for him the silence of the star-lit night—the dream of death. *She* was the expected friend, often he seemed to feel her near, and on this night too, it seemed to him as if some suave presence unexpectedly passed through the air; it was not a breeze, not perfume, not melody, but something more nerve-racking, more sweet, a mysterious caress, the breath of *her*, who in passing, brushed him with her robe of black velvet, caressed him with soft hands.

“It must be the dying prisoner—yes, I remember that when Mamma died it seemed to me that invisible hands, soft as down, fluttered over my face.”

He walked slowly from the edge of the precipice towards the

street. Sleep overcame him. One moment and he could no longer move—tired out, he sat down on the jutting mass which dominated the precipice. He laid the gun across his knees, and he thought that an invisible hand closed his eyes.

So, for a moment, with closed eyes he saw clearly, but as it were through an enchanted veil ; the sea without colour ; the lights—yellow against the black lines of the neighbouring coast—the stars, the gleam suggestive of a lighthouse, and at his feet he felt the sad breath of the waves, and it seemed to him that the island was like a misused mandoline, upside down on the waters which caused its string to vibrate in a sigh of infinite sorrow. Sleep—sleep—never till this moment had he known the pain of sleep unsatisfied. He seemed to hear furtive footsteps, and always his thoughts reverted to the convict in his death agony—perhaps already dead. He at all events, had secured sleep once for all ! He knew the man, he had often watched him while repairing the pavement of the road ; he had been a mason—one of the best types in the penitentiary, a tall figure, lean and bent, with the pleasant face of a fair old man, and two yellowish smiling eyes.

* * *

But—but—he really seemed conscious of the rustle of mysterious footsteps. He opened his eyes and shook himself. Stories of escaped convicts recurred to his mind. A few months earlier, five persons—amongst them an old man of seventy—had with marvellous astuteness succeeded in escaping—taking advantage of an oyster-fisher's boat. On arriving at the opposite shore they had not known where to hide themselves and for eight days had roamed hills too much frequented ; thus they had been pursued like wild beasts, retaken and again imprisoned, stripped of their clothing, on the summit of the convict island.

* * *

Was it suggestion ? Was it reality ? A furtive step ! Undoubtedly a man was sliding down behind the wall along the road. There was now no doubt of it.

"Who goes there?"

His voice resounded strangely clear and metallic. Then for some time it was silent as before.

He was thinking that he had been again mistaken, when a man sprang from the top of the parapet and rapidly descended the road.

"Who goes there?"

Although prepared for everything, Serafino felt a shudder pass over him from his feet to his neck.

"Hush!" whispered the man, approaching boldly.

In the darkness of the night his arms could be seen stretched out before him, in the act of defence or supplication. He paused only when the soldier's gun touched his hand.

And—his horror changing to surprise—Serafino recognised the moribund convict.

"Halt, or I kill you!"

The convict bent, knelt down—always with his arms extended in the act of prayer or instinctive defence.

"Where are you going?" shouted Serafino.

"Don't shout like that," pleaded the convict, in a low but firm voice. "Bind me—here are my hands—but don't call. You are a Christian and must know the commandment Thou shalt not kill. I am old and you can bind me."

"Silence!" shouted the other, assuming a severe manner. "Say where you were going."

"I wanted to escape," replied the old man, simply, lowering his arms.

And thinking doubtless that the soldier, in spite of his severe manner, was a Christian, he ventured to add: "Let me go. Nobody will know that I passed here."

"Silence, or I will fire! I shall now give the alarm."

A moving, rapid scene now took place. The man bent his shoulders still more, dragged himself along on his knees, and took refuge, like a dog, between Serafino's legs—almost as if seeking in him a defence against the others who might appear from one moment to the next.

"No, no, my son, Christian, no, don't call!" he pleaded.

And since Serafino listened to him, he took courage to raise himself somewhat, and placed one hand over the other. "Bind me, bind me!" he begged, "but don't call. I feigned illness in order to escape. There is a woman, an old one, who has been waiting for me twenty years. She is my wife. She has now written that she is ill, very ill, but she would die happy if she could see me once more. I have written that I would have done anything to please her, to give her this joy after having caused her so much pain all her life. Now she expects me. I must keep my word or she will die of despair. What shall I do if you will not have pity on me? Christian, have pity! If not for me, for that old, dying woman, who has suffered so much. If your father found himself in my position before my soldier son—what would you say? Let me go. We are all brothers in the world. Who knows but one day I might be useful to you. Here—" he added, encouraged by Serafino's silence, turning himself, still on his knees, towards the rock, "I will descend here. The rock leaves no traces. You have seen nothing, and—God will reward you."

Serafino thought he was dreaming. He wanted to give the alarm, to bind the man, to do what his superiors called his "duty," but he could not. A mysterious force, such as comes in dreams, prevented all movement. The panting and suppliant breath of the condemned man woke in him a profound pity and almost a sense of admiration for this old being, who from the abyss of misery clung still to life with so much faith, so much passion.

Without asking himself which had more value—his life or that of this unfortunate, he thought that perhaps now his hour to die had come. His death might be interpreted as an act of homage to duty—no, he could not let this opportunity pass.

"Go on," he murmured; took up his gun and placed it on the ground.

The man embraced his knees in silence, then putting one hand on the ground, he raised himself with difficulty. Tall and dark as the night, he murmured a benediction: "My son,

you will be rich and happy—your fortune will equal your charity.”

With eyes veiled by tears Serafino saw the long, black figure climb the wall of the rock, heard some small pieces of stone fall down—down.

Then the musical lament of the waves returned to break the silence of the night.

* * *

“Rich and happy !” thought Serafino. “On the contrary, nobody will ever be more miserable and unhappy than I.”

And in that supreme moment, instead of recalling some solemn event, he thought with bitterness how he had never eaten delicate food except some oysters which were to be found up there. Then other wretched memories came back : the hopeless struggle to preserve his shoes intact as long as possible—the long and vain desire to possess a black suit—the relatively serious sacrifices necessary in order to put away enough to pay for woollen clothing for the winter.

Misery of miseries ! Everything he had was old and poor and used-up, and perhaps even his soul was worn out and frayed like old cloth. But now everything was finished—finished the battle with Fate, from whom he felt happy in being able, at one time, to tear away two victims—himself and the old recluse. And, like the old recluse, he too wanted to escape from the house of pain.

* * *

He put the gun to the ground and placed his throat to its cold muzzle.

The supreme moment had come. He would die without love, without hope, without faith, but with a mysterious sense of pity at his heart.

No one would weep for him, but he died weeping for all those who suffered. Good-bye ! He no longer saw the light of the stars, no longer heard the voice of the sea. The great black veil of death covers and obscures everything.

Good-bye ! But while he stood there grouping for the trigger, the gun slipped and fell to the ground with a vibrating noise.

* * *

At that noise he trembled and awoke—saw the stars and heard the murmur of the waves beating lightly. The gun had really fallen from his knees, and for some moments he could not move—even to pick it up—so stiffened he had been by the impression of his dream.

* * *

Next day he heard that in the exact hour of his dream the old convict had really escaped across a pass on which no sentinel could impede his progress. He was dead.

* * *

Evening fell. The acacias and the reeds rustled like silken draperies, always darker in the vitreous distance of the sky furrowed by rosy clouds. The sanguinary or violet waves scarcely curled themselves before the chill breath of the wind.

The soliders were singing in the courtyard with the desolate howls of chained up dogs. Serafino, instead of standing in front of the big door, took advantage of the free hour to write a novelette.

The soldiers' songs gave him the same somnolent and homesick impression as the monotonous chorus of the women, who, on the summer evenings, along the beach from Bagnoli to Pozzuoli came together to sing a sort of sorrowful prayer. And he too, while writing his novelette, felt a puerile desire to pray, to curse, to weep. It seemed to him that all around him everything had assumed mysterious proportions—even the most humble thing, such as the drop of water which on the white wood of the table burned in the reflection of the sunset like a drop of dew.

A black cat with yellow eyes, seated on the edge of the table, looked on a little curiously, a little nervously, and every now

and then stretched out a paw in the endeavour to catch the pen of the writing soldier.

At times the music maniac soldier would seat himself at the same table to compose a Romanza. The cat then tried the same game with him, but a "sh" soon made him retire with dignity.

Serafino wrote—and wrote. One evening the music maniac observed that at the end of the page the writer was putting his name.

"May I read it?"

"I cannot—" said Serafino, at first, but after some pressing he handed over the manuscript.

The novelette was in the form of a diary. A soldier in service at Nisida, in charge of the convicts, allows himself, day after day, to be overcome by pity for one of the convicts, who prays him to aid his escape. The man is a mason, who is put to work on the road leading from the sea to the penitentiary, thus he often has opportunities of speaking to the soldier and telling him a long story of injustice and sorrow.

The soldier, although he has a proud sense of duty, ends by letting himself be persuaded—and one night, while he is on guard, he sees the prisoner pass—and has not the heart to give the alarm. After that he shoots himself.

To the music maniac the story appeared so human and so touching that he judged it with the usual remark :

"It seems like a Russian novel !"

"Why not an American also? Try to imagine that this incident happened to me," cried Serafino with irritation.

"Oh, you are still alive !"

"And yet it did happen—in a dream !"

"In a dream?"

"Yes, in a dream, or in that part of our existence which we call dream, and which, on the other hand, may be reality. For do we know at all where reality begins and ends?"

"In point of fact, while I am listening to you, I feel as if I were dreaming," said the other ironically.

Then began one of their interminable discussions, at the end

of which they found themselves so far in agreement that they decided to share the expense of the postage by sending the Romance and the Novelette in one registered parcel to a certain Review in Milan.

For a long time they waited in vain for an answer.

* * *

He was living in two ground-floor rooms, provided with a temporary roof, in an old house, or rather, in a house of which only the walls had been built, which had then been abandoned, and was now practically a ruin. A granite staircase, the resort of lizards and spiders, led to the upper floors, and sometimes Serafino climbed up and roamed about like the lizards, standing in the apertures of the windows, and thinking that life for him was like this house without a roof and without shutters, the walls of which grew old without a purpose.

The mountain forest rose behind the house, and in the nights of spring he smelt the perfume of the wood-cyclamen. A small, neglected orchard separated the school from the master's dwelling. Nothing could be more desolate and melancholy, especially in the overcast days of autumn, then this patch of ground, covered with deadly nightshade, with vanilla, and bushes of rue, with all their bitter odours.

One autumn day, just one of those damp and dreary days when everything is smothered by an opaque and uniform desolation—but which seem closer to us, more united in mysterious bonds of sympathy—when the scent of rue or of grey wormwood, or a branch of wild rose may bring back to the heart all a vanished past. On such a day Serafino received a letter with the Dutch post-mark. For a long time he looked in surprise at the transparent blue envelope, on which his name—in a round handwriting—made a strange impression upon him. Where and when had he seen his name thus written? He remembered how, in his days of adolescence, when he wrote his first story, he had dreamt of be-

coming a famous author and receiving every day elegant letters from distant countries.

He broke open the envelope in agitation, seized by a feeling of anxious premonition.

* * *

SIR,

In the *Milan Review* I have read your exquisite story, *Pity*, and would very much like to translate it into German and Dutch if you have not already disposed of it. The German translation I could almost certainly place in *Die Zeit*, which, as you will know, is one of the most famous reviews in Vienna. I am German, but my mother's parents were Dutch, and I know this language perfectly, as I nearly always live in Holland. I have been many times in Italy, and in Florence I had the good fortune to be received in the house of Professor Rigutini, I therefore know Italian well enough, and you can be sure of a faithful translation. During a sojourn at Naples where I count on returning this winter, I visited the island Nisida, which also added to my interest in *Pity*. We shall easily agree about terms, because I shall direct *Die Zeit* to forward the whole payment for the novel direct to you.

In addition I should be glad if you would let me know whether you have published other novels, and I should be grateful for some biographical notes, which I should like to add to the translation.

Hoping to receive an early and favourable reply, I beg you to accept my sincere homage.

ELIZABETH KERKER.

* * *

Serafino had always imagined that glory and good fortune would bring an ardent breath of joy. Why then did Elizabeth Kerker's letter give him rather a feeling of terror?

At first he had not even the courage to read it over again. Was it a dream? He tried to convince himself of the contrary by looking all around, and driving a pin into his hand.

Finally he re-read the letter and then hid it, fearful that some malevolent being might rob him of his treasure.

His first thought, in regarding himself as a celebrated person, was the conviction that envious people would try to poison his delight. But he felt more kindly than was usual with him, and he had compassion on the envious ones, who mostly are envious because they are unhappy. And finally he felt happy—so happy that he was afraid.

He opened the windows, and seated himself at his table. Everything was grey, sad, and silent, but for him there had opened an immense and flaming horizon.

He never forgot that sweet and trembling hour of intoxication.

* * *

DEAR MADAM,

In accepting your proposal I thank you most gratefully. Could you but know what you have done for me !

I am not a writer, but as you wish to know something about me, let me tell you that I am a humble elementary teacher, a poor youth exiled in a wild and desolate country. I am alone, so alone in this sad desert that a friendly voice—even far off—is sufficient to give me renewed courage and hope. Your letter, gentle lady, arrived in a moment of despair, when the thought of death caressed me with the sweetness of a maternal embrace. I did not even know that my novel had been published. I wrote it in one of the saddest periods of my life, and it interests because it was *felt*. In the place of my hero I should have done as he did. I will tell you something more. I *dreamt the whole story*.

The impression made by this dream was so profound that for a long time I really believed I had seen the face of the convict imploring my pity. Again I would see it, as he blessed and wished me luck. Whenever I was unhappy or had vain dreams of a little affection and human sympathy, the prophecy of the prisoner would come back to my memory with some bitterness—like the taunt of destiny. But to-day I began

to believe that my sentiment of pity to one's neighbour has not been in vain.

Every kind of hour arrives, and for me the hour of joy has arrived too. To-day I begin to live. I seem to have awakened from a long sleep and feel a mysterious force springing up within me. I thought I was alone—an exile through life, but now I know that the voice of my spirit can travel through space—has already so travelled, and has called forth an answer from kindred souls. And this thought—more than the pride of knowing that my modest work has been recognised in distant lands—is enough to make me love life.

Thanks once more, dear lady, for the good that you have done me and believe me yours in deepest gratitude,

SERAFINO ROSSI.

* * *

SIR,

I have received your letter and thank you for the confidence you have shown me. You have a truly noble spirit and I am happy to have become acquainted with you. I hope to get further letters from you not less delightfully sincere than the first one. I feel that you are very young. I am some years older, and may therefore be allowed to be not only your translator, but in some degree your far-off friend. Far-off is really now a mere *façon de parler*, for distance scarcely counts—so much so, that, as I read lately in a pleasant article of *Figaro*, there are ladies who are arranging a visit from Europe to America.

Your letter interested me as much as, perhaps more than, your novel. It was like a page of romance, but who has not at least one page of romance, more or less beautiful, more or less terrible, in his life?

In your *Pity*, I felt just that quality of *truth* which struck me for a special reason.

An old friend of my family, whom I loved like a father was, some years ago, sentenced for having killed his second wife who had been unfaithful to him. He tried to escape, and was

killed by a warder of the penitentiary. As you can imagine your novel moved me profoundly. For this reason—but not less on account of its simple and suggestive style—I dare to advise you to continue writing.

I also have written some novels and translated Italian poetry and romances ; also I, during the months which I pass in Holland, have a school of some thirty poor children. As you see, our lives have some resemblance. I, however, have more faith in Life than you, and so I venture to say you are wrong to despair. Poverty is often a fortune, if you will excuse the paradox. The poor man has less opportunity than the rich man to waste his life uselessly—has more than the rich man the means of living a truly moral life ; and if there were nothing else the life of the poor man is more complete because he owes it—materially also—entirely to himself. The man of talent therefore—with a little good will—can arrive wherever he likes. No, believe me, poverty is the least of human ills. For the rest, Fate is so capricious that she often gives spontaneously, and in one moment, as much as for years and years she has withheld.

Excuse me, Sir, if I express myself badly. I would like to know the harmonious secret of your beautiful language in order to express my thoughts and opinions better—opinions and ideas which have matured within my brain by reason of sad experiences. But I hope that our acquaintance will continue, and that thus we shall have many opportunities of getting to know each other better, etc., etcetera.

* * *

The etc., etcetera, were Serafino's, the last part of the letter from Elizabeth Kerker having struck him as being not quite sincere.

“She will be one of those moneyed foreigners, in spectacles—a rich person, in fact—one of those who amuse themselves with the poor, taking them under their protection, and then saying to them, Blessed are you !”

All the same he went on writing—as training, or from boredom ; just for the pleasure of describing his own house, the orchard, the mountain, the school, the children—in fact the whole frame which fitted so well the melancholy picture of his life.

* * *

Letters which formed the first chapter of an epistolary romance—not more stupid or more interesting than thousands of other romances of the same kind—letters which arrive regularly to almost all young authors and authoresses.

It would be impossible to reproduce the whole correspondence of the two writers, which lasted through a year and a half.

* * *

So a year and six months passed. Two wet, cold, autumns, one warm spring, one hot summer and two winters tepid and clear like spring.

Serafino remembered nothing of the sadness or the splendour of other seasons through which he had passed like a blind wayfarer ; but he never forgot the heat of that spring and the softness of those two last winters spent in the village where lived his enemy the writer.

Never enemy suffered more than this writer. The whole district now venerated the master for the simple reason that the administration of *Die Zeit* had sent ten copies of the paper and seventy florins in a registered letter. Serafino had certainly not desired fame in the district where he taught, but the secret of his glory and his fortune had been betrayed by the post office.

Also the small person of Zuloaga one day fixed a benignant and rather voluptuous eye upon the master—but the master never noticed it.

* * *

Even if the winter had been cold and miserable he would not have suffered from the cold and misery. Everything about

him now was lovely and clear. He *felt* himself loved. He loved ! Actually Elizabeth had never written that she loved him, nor had he written this to her, but certain things don't need to be explained—they are understood.

Besides, Serafino loved as he had dreamt of loving, without thought, without expectation ; just for the sake of loving. Elizabeth was very rich, much richer than the small Zuloaga. Also she was proud but differently from the girl of the district. One day she wrote to her friend these words :

"I am happy that there exists a great obstacle between me and the man who one day will say he loves me—one of those moral obstacles that it is not everyone who can overcome. . . ."

Serafino did not ask what was the nature of this obstacle. Was it a blot upon Elizabeth's past ? It mattered little to him, certain as he was that he would never reach his translator, and would never seek her love. However his old romantic dream having become reality, he thought no more about death.

* * *

Thus the second springtime came. The rugged walls of the abandoned house were covered with musk, with little yellow flowers, and from the mountain came the sweet scent of the cyclamen.

For the Easter vacation Serafino went to Naples. At Naples he bought a mauve silk cravat and putting it on before the mirror in the shop he was quite aware that it suited him well, and that he was a good-looking fellow. He remembered having read a notice some days before in the *Mattino* about a rich American who had married a conductor on the funicular railway because he was a good-looking fellow.

From the shop he went direct to the Hotel Cavour where Elizabeth was expecting him, having arrived the previous evening from Rome.

Serafino felt strangely calm, and firm in his intention to maintain a dignified demeanour before the rich foreigner, but no sooner had he got to the Railway Square than he

paused, and had to acknowledge that in spite of everything, his heart was beating loudly.

A picturesque and multi-coloured crowd gave animation to the Square, the air was mild and the sky dotted with luminous pearly clouds which passed rapidly as if hastening to a meeting.

While he was choosing a bunch of roses from the basket of a florist, he caught sight of a handsome youth dressed with extreme elegance—a high collar and yellow shoes. Serafino blushed and felt shame at having thought of the rich American and the conductor of the funicular railway.

* * *

Two hours later he and the beautiful Elizabeth Kerker found themselves on the little pier of Bagnoli facing Nisida.

Elizabeth was almost as beautiful as an Italian. No spectacles, hair and eyes black, complexion warm brown, mouth large and rosy, teeth like pearls. The thing that did not please Serafino was the curl of her lips when she pronounced some difficult Italian word.

But suddenly she began to speak in German. "See," she had said in Italian, looking at the luminous bank where the sea softly splashed its blue foam, "here I seem to read that marvellous page of the '*Letters which never reached him*,' in which the authoress tells her dream"; and in German she repeated the words of the " 'Marvellous Page' " :

"I saw a limpid sea like a mirror, above which the sky extended its infinite height. Close to the bank two persons were seated—above them both lay an enchantment of youth, of dawn, of things primordial. . ."

Serafino did not know German and did not gather the significance of Elizabeth's recollection, but while she was speaking her native tongue her lips had acquired so beautiful a line that he looked at her as one parched with thirst might look at a ripe fruit. She responded quickly to this look. Serafino turned his glance further away, determined not to

betray himself again, but to preserve all his dignity as a poor man. However he asked innocently :

“Will you translate those words into Italian ?”

Elizabeth translated them.

* * *

From that moment he commenced to lose his poor man's dignity. Elizabeth then not only loved him, she invited him to love her. And he was not so ingenuous as not to profit by the opportunity, only he did not know how to begin. And also he was diffident.

Who was Elizabeth ? Where did she come from ? Was she free ? Was she pure ? What was the obstacle to which she had once-referred ?

They remained the whole day at Bagnoli ; together they went to eat beneath the flowery pergola of the little restaurant Don Salvatore, in front of which the old fellow with the bronzed face, who watched over his primitive cooking stove, saluted them affectionately, taking them to be newly married. After which they went on to Nisida. The soft breath of spring was on the water, the waves looked like enormous garlands of blue and golden flowers. An aureole of golden clouds crowned the outlines of the green hills and blue islands. But Elizabeth, whose slender figure was reflected in the blue mirror of the sea, had become sad, almost moody, with thoughts far away. She scarcely seemed conscious of Serafino's presence.

Nisida drew near, slowly losing its resemblance to a mandoline reversed upon the sea—always nearer came the coloured houses, the blue rocks, the cliffs, the white house of living death.

Elizabeth looked up ; when they disembarked at the island she took the arm of her companion to cross the paved road of the pier, and said : “In almost all romances there is one chapter in which two lovers . . . or who will become lovers . . . make a trip to an old castle or to a museum, or to a country church. The author takes the opportunity to bring out his artistic culture, and the two lovers take the oppor-

tunity . . . to explain themselves. But I scarcely think that any couple ever came, like us, to visit a penal settlement !”

“It is true !” he said, breathlessly.

His voice trembled—his heart beat loud. What was Elizabeth going to say ? Had the time for explanation come ? The road, between its two walls, every now and then broken by an iron gate through which one caught glimpses of green and blue, with the sea shining in the distance, was deserted and hot, with a luminous sky above.

Serafino only needed to put out a hand to draw the stranger to him—and he had no other wish ; but he did not dare. It seemed to him that Elizabeth was jesting—no, it was not possible that she was in earnest. The very rustle of her garments put the poor schoolmaster on his guard. But he feared to look ridiculous with his awkward timidity.

Of a sudden the road turned and opened on to a rocky precipice at the bottom of which the sea was sighing a tender lament.

Elizabeth stopped and gazed with thoughtful eyes.

“Was it such a spot ? ” she asked.

“Yes.”

And Serafino did not know by what law of mnemonics he recalled his whole past, as in his dream. And now ? Now he is there, the lover—and perhaps beloved—there with his companion, beautiful and intelligent, who came from afar, like the waves, and the clouds, and the birds, and who perhaps waited for a word to offer him all her beauty and her fortune.

With an impetus almost desperate he embraced her.

Elizabeth lifted her head proudly, and he became conscious of something strange. She was crying.

“Why ? ” he asked, with supplication in his eyes. “Forgive me. I am mad. But say just one word to me—tell me that you care for me—then—if you wish, you shall never see me again—never—never—,” he repeated, like a child, overcome by her sorrow.

“It is not that,” she said, again letting her face touch his. “I love you—I am crying for another reason. But yes, I will tell

you now, or I shall never be able to tell you. Do you remember? The old friend who tried to escape from the house of pain, and was killed by a warder—he was my father——”

“Elizabeth—Elizabeth.”

He was as pale as death, and his lower lip twitched convulsively. He could not say another word.

“Elizabeth—Elizabeth——”

Elizabeth spoke :

“This is why I was touched by the voice of your distant soul. You would have had pity on my father—you will have pity on me——”

But no, in truth, it was she who had to have pity on him. Seeing him trembling like a child, close to her, fearful that she would leave him, she smiled—her eyes still wet with tears, and bent her head a little, the better to approach her lips to his.

(From “Cattive Compagnie.” Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)



VIRGILIO BROCCHI

(1876-)



POOR DEAR AGNES

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

IT was worse than a sorrow ; it was like an earthquake that had shaken the world and left the survivors stunned and confused. But Claudio Volterri felt, just as acutely as he felt this great sorrow, an overwhelming self-pity, a vague bitterness, half remorse and half grief. He felt he had been cruelly and unjustly treated, and so he suffered in vain.

When you saw him going down the street from his hotel to the old house where he was supervising the removals, you could see at once that he had had a great blow of some sort. He walked close to the wall, hanging his head and dragging his feet ; his pale face was earthy and flabby, and although his hair showed grey at the temples under his hard hat, his thick moustache was still red. He dragged a yellow dog behind him on a leash. But to understand the whole extent of his misery and grief, you would have to watch him unobserved. Then, a pathetic figure, swimming in his black suit that was much too big for him now, with his collar edged with black to shew his mourning, he kept rummaging about in boxes and drawers enclosing all too painful memories ; and automatically he pulled up his trousers from the waist where they kept slipping down again. Then he threw himself into an armchair, put his big head on his hands and shut his eyes on the tears that ran like wrinkles down his thin face.

It was not only that his wife had died suddenly and unexpectedly ; but with his wife's death his inspiration, his coun-

seller and guide—indeed the standard by which his life was fixed—had been taken from him. He was left dazed and miserable, but as well as this he felt overwhelmed by remorse at not having appreciated his lack of responsibility and his quiet easy-going life where everything was fixed by a timetable from morning till night. He felt remorse, too, because he had grumbled (it is true it was secretly—but still he *had* grumbled) at poor Agnes' strictness, her unreasonable jealousy and her continual reproaches ; they had seemed so absolutely intolerable, so bitter and disagreeable just because he had been stupid enough not to notice the illness she had had for years that had swollen and weighed down her poor body and at last overcame her completely. And when he thought of all the trouble she had saved him—she even chose his books for him, put out his clothes and varied them according to the weather, took the things he didn't want out of his pocket book, saw that he did not carry too much money about with him, accompanied him to the theatre although she was very ill herself, and then persuaded him to leave after the second act so that he shouldn't lose a good night's rest—and he had wanted to break loose and had grumbled about his lack of liberty (what would he have done with liberty anyhow ?) he felt this was too much for him. He had been ungrateful towards this good woman who had given up her whole life to him ; and she must have known her end was near because sometimes she used to ask him, sometimes a little irritably, sometimes rather pathetically :

“Claudio, what will become of you when I'm dead ?”

And now this was what had become of him ; he was a poor trembling creature like his little dog, who snarled and growled in the house and was never afraid of people, but who did not dare to go out without a leash because it was so afraid of other dogs. Funny little arrogant, frightened beast ! Sometimes Claudio used to look at it, when it stood, just the colour of its master's moustache, firmly on a chair and stuck out its little black snub nose and looked at him with intelligent eyes and then whined very softly. Claudio never quite believed that

Agnes' soul had transmigrated into the little dog's body, but he got sentimental over it and wept when he thought that Bibi was the only living thing that his dead wife had left living. Then he put his cheek against the little dog's back, begged its pardon because he had not treated it well enough and because he had sworn silently every time he had had to take it for a walk. Now he swore that he would love it, always and above everything else in the world.

He felt sometimes that he must be ill, crying like this when anything he found in a drawer reminded him of his wife, or when he read an old letter and had not the courage to burn it. He had collected bundle upon bundle of old letters and put them in a big suit-case, to celebrate his grief.

He hoped for a moment that he would be happier in a new flat where he would not always be seeing her figure appearing in the doorways, or sitting in the chairs where she had sat.

But changing house seemed to make no difference at all. On the contrary, that long series of big rooms seemed deserted ; he could not fill them with sound and movement and even the voices of cook and housemaid were stilled in sympathy with his silence ; and his soul was overwhelmed with grief there. He felt so lonely and unhappy and miserable that he used to spend hour upon hour huddled up in an armchair, weeping bitterly.

Fortunately he had his friends who kept saying to him : "But, my dear Claudio, you're ill—you must call in the doctor." His coat hung loosely on his thin shoulders, his waistcoat made an empty bulge over his stomach, and his trousers came down. He had no appetite, his heart beat wildly and sometimes he felt something throbbing in his groins and in his throat. Then his eyes seemed to grow dim and he felt as if he must fall over ; his back ached, and worst of all, his memory became so bad that he forgot what he had to do, whom he had to write to ; when he had written a letter it used to hang about the place because he had forgotten whom it was intended for. He used to stand and hesitate in front of the pillar box, reading the address over and over again, and one day he rushed back

panting to the house, terrified because he thought he had put the wrong letters in the wrong envelopes just as he had done once twenty-three years ago when he had sent a letter to his mistress to his mother by mistake.

The worst of all was when he began to be terrified of death—he, who had called on death so many times to deliver him. He groaned at the same time at the fate that had taken away his Agnes, and at the symptoms of his own illness which was becoming more and more dangerous and pronounced.

“Really, Claudio, you must pull yourself together—you’re not a baby, you know—you’re getting thinner every day ; you really must see a doctor.”

And Claudio did call the doctor although it seemed to him terribly hard not only to have to die, but to know for certain that he had to die. While the doctor was feeling and tapping and listening to his breath, Claudio kept thinking : “weak heart—nephritis—tuberculosis . . .” and with moist eyes, he began to imagine the cold, the stiffness, the hearse and the damp earth. . . .

“Do you know what’s the matter with you ?” the doctor asked.

“Well, that’s the end,” he thought, holding his breath. But he said nothing.

“There’s nothing the matter with you ; you’re perfectly all right. You’ve only got your nerves in a thoroughly bad state—and unless you begin taking care of yourself now, in a month’s time you’ll have all the illnesses you haven’t got now.”

Claudio breathed again ; he felt as if he had never been better in his life, and he began to love the doctor like a brother and a saviour. He told him all his sad story, how he was a widower now at forty-five, after twenty-two years when his wife had thought and acted and more or less lived for him. Then he confessed that he had no friends or relations in Turin, and he did not really feel strong enough to go back to his own home, or to travel and amuse himself. He ended by beseeching the doctor to take him in at his own sanatorium.

“If you insist, I will,” the doctor answered. “After all, you

are ill in a sort of way, and a little discipline will do you a world of good."

Yes ; he really needed discipline. Once unfortunately he had paid no attention to such things, when he had sown his wild oats as a young man, before he had the luck to meet Agnes ; but then afterwards ! . . .

In the sanatorium he found all the things that had made his life happy before ; the times for getting up and for going to bed were fixed, the food was arranged and given out in portions ; so were the drinks and medicines for the patients. Then the doctor looked after him, gave him injections and saw to his baths, exercises and cure. He began to be cheered by the pleasant company of men and women who managed (although they did grumble a little about their ailments) to liven up the place with their talk and laughter. The white dining-room, the white drawing-rooms and the white verandahs were all gay with palms and flowers and flooded with sunlight ; you looked out on to the little private hill and to other lovely hills beyond, clustering round like a garland in all their spring freshness.

It was not a hospital ; it was a pleasant refuge full of peace and repose. Claudio Volterri kept saying this to himself with ever-increasing satisfaction. In the midst of his new friends, both men and women, the strong nurses, and the quiet nuns in blue and white who talked French and looked gently out of their clear, almost childishly innocent eyes, he felt he was getting a new lease of life. He was spoilt and coddled, and even began to admit to himself that he was extraordinarily happy there, almost as if he were at home.

Yes, almost ; or rather, to tell the truth, just a little happier. Only a little happier, but still definitely happier. Only Agnes was lacking ; and when he thought of her the shock of her death touched him deeply. But he did not always think of her. The more he improved in health, the less he minded the thought of her death. But at the same time the respect and love and gratitude he felt towards the poor dead woman grew, she had made marriage a noble and a beautiful thing for him ;

so that when he heard people making jokes about women, or love, or family life, and when they made cynical remarks about celibacy being best, or warning people against marriage, he sighed.

"I should be a brute if I didn't object."

Or he would say :

"I've only one thing to complain of—I lost my wife too soon."

Or else :

"If you were sure of finding a wife like mine, I should advise you to get married at once if you want to be happy."

All the women liked him for this. They enjoyed his company. The gloomy, silent man, wrapped up in his own sorrow, was beginning to lose his old stiffness. He melted and began to hold his head up, and looked at you with a penetrating, intelligent, rather inquisitive glance. Sometimes he talked with great shrewdness ; when he left off being shy he spoke eloquently, sarcastically and wittily.

"Barrister, you look twenty-five years younger," the doctor told him.

Everyone called him "Barrister" even though he had only practised for a year or two and pleaded in a political case ; then he had preferred to give up his profession and live on his income.

"You mean you don't want me to stay here in your sanatorium?"

"Well, you're really better than I am."

"So you're afraid people will say you keep me here as an advertisement? In short, you're dismissing me—just like that? After three months of perfectly wonderful leisure I don't know a bit where to go."

The doctor smiled.

"Well let's say to-morrow then—how's that? But don't go and shut yourself up in your house. I let you go on the condition that you only stay at Turin just as long as you need to pack up your boxes, and that you don't go straight to bed to-morrow night but go to the theatre instead."

"But I'm in mourning," Claudio answered rather plaintively.

"Well, I didn't tell you to go to a dance. You go to the theatre just as you read a book. Anyhow I prescribe it—your medicine."

Since it really was a question of treatment, even Agnes' spirit would have encouraged him to go to the theatre if it could have understood and seen what was the matter, particularly as the doctor happened to be right. Theatre going is not merely an amusement, but an instructive pastime. So Claudio took a ticket at the *Alfieri*. He had not the slightest idea that there was going to be a variety entertainment—the sort of show his wife had so flatly forbidden that he had not seen one for over twenty years. If he had known what was on he would have avoided going to that theatre even though it was the closest to his house ; it was also the theatre with the least painful associations. But when he got there and saw what the programme was he had not the courage to go away, so he went in, and made a vow to Agnes' spirit that at the end of the second act he would leave the theatre just as if she had been there to remind him of his old habits.

But the unfortunate programme and the thought of his wife made Claudio so unhappy that he expected to spend a miserable evening, so he went and sat down in the stalls looking very gloomy.

He made a mistake there. The entertainment struck him as being new and fresh ; the chorus girls and the dancers, brilliant in the limelight ; the gay lilting music, the spicy comments from up in the gallery, all distracted his attention completely from his ordinary life so that he seemed to be back in his student days. He remembered them as if they were only yesterday—those times when he used to climb with his friends right up into the "gods," and shouted all the songs, and took the chorus-girls out to supper. What a funny thing ! . . . Over there on the stage there was a pert little chorus girl who looked just like . . . what the devil was she called ? . . . oh yes, of course . . . Margherita ! No, it couldn't possibly be Margherita, it was much too long ago . . . but still, she was just like that, red hair and red arm-pits, the same nose and the

same eyes. . . . Exactly like her ! And he began to stare at her : then he asked the man who was sitting next him whether he could lend him his opera glasses, to stare at her again.

What a charming man sitting next to him ! And his wife too—a real lady, refined and cultured and intelligent—and still pretty though she must be well over forty ! Borrowing the opera glasses was an excellent excuse for getting into conversation. It was an extraordinarily pleasant conversation ; Claudio felt his new acquaintances liked his company and he certainly liked theirs ! You could say they were friends really, already. Sometimes people who are rather reserved but really very affectionate feel a sudden friendly impulse towards someone they see for the first time. Claudio's new friends were so friendly and communicative that he soon knew that the Cavaliere Bellati was a native of Vicenza who had been at Turin for ten years as Commissioner of Finances. He had married his cousin and was extraordinarily happy ; he lived in Via Lagrange and hoped that Volterri would call on him one day if he liked to spend a quiet evening with the family ; and so on and so on and so on. This talkative gentleman from Vicenza went on to say that his wife usually spent her holidays at Cogna di Cadore, and he was sure that Volterri would have a wonderful time there if he felt like honouring them with his company.

The conversation was so pleasant that the interval after the second act seemed to go by in a moment and the curtain went up for the third act without Claudio having noticed it or even thought of his silent and solemn oath. When he noticed it and remembered what he had promised, the performance was over and Signor Bellati was just asking him to lunch next Saturday. Claudio was so overcome with remorse that as soon as he had accepted the invitation, he dashed out of the theatre. Then he began tearing through the streets at a frantic rate, as if he expected to find his wife waiting for him in a furious temper ; he arrived at home puffing and panting, with his heart throbbing wildly. "What a fool I am," he smiled, as he put the key in the lock "—I might have caught pneumonia like that !"

He delighted in going upstairs slowly and sedately, after rushing through the streets in such violent haste. He reached the first floor and then the second. There he stopped in front of his door and read the brass plate with his name on—you never know in a new house ; and after having been away many months he really might have made a mistake. Then he heard a rush of little feet on the wooden floor and a soft whine from behind the door.

"Bibi . . . Poor Bibi !"

To think he had nearly forgotten him !

The little dog jumped around him whining ; it arched its back like a cat and rubbed itself against its master's legs. It stretched its paws and scratched his knees, and then thrust out its little black nose and licked his hands.

"Poor Bibi, poor Bibi !" Claudio took it up in his arms and looked tenderly into those wonderful pathetic eyes that seemed moist with tears. He felt the little creature trembling all over and bent down to touch its tawny coat with his tawny moustache. He let it lick his face and whine. Then he carried it into his room and put it on the bed as if it had been a baby, something infinitely precious. There he became quite sentimental over it, when he thought that all he loved in the world was concentrated in that little creature that understood and loved and remembered like a child, even though it could not talk.

The bother was getting Bibi off the bed and out of the room. He struggled, wriggled, hid himself and whined. Claudio, who was very weak-minded when it came to being sentimental, came to a compromise with the little dog although he really did not want it there. He neither turned it out of the room nor left it on the bed. He made a place for it on a chair at the bottom of the bed. Bibi curled up there with one of his paws over his little snub nose, and went to sleep making happy little noises. Claudio was pleased to see it happy but he was rather annoyed too. Still, he thought he had done a kind deed and perhaps because of this he slept the sleep of the righteous all night long though he kept well to the edge of the bed as if he

did not want to disturb someone who was lying beside him who might wake up and kick him.

Next day however he really was annoyed because he discovered that he hadn't a single decent garment to put on when he went to lunch with the Cavaliere Bellati. He must see about it at once. Then he was sorry and asked Agnes' spirit to pardon him for offending it—but could he have a new suit made by the little dressmaker his wife had chosen for him?

Good Lord, though, one must be reasonable! And since he had to go to a tailor, he might as well go to the best tailor in Turin. In four days' time Claudio Volterri appeared in a magnificent black suit that made his shoulders look broader, his waist slender, the trousers and the jacket both hung perfectly. It was amazing When he looked at himself in the glass and saw himself looking so smart, young and tall and slim, clean cut and bright eyed, with his rather sarcastic mouth smiling under a big red moustache, he recognised the old Claudio Volterri of twenty years ago he had known up at the University—a real blood, what? He was delighted with himself and smiled secretly: he almost rubbed his hands together in his glee.

"Will you take it off?—I'll have your new suit sent. . . ."

"No . . . send me the old one."

It was not really vanity; Claudio had realised it was Saturday and that he had put on a clean shirt that morning, so it was not really worth while undressing and then dressing all over again to go to his luncheon in Via Lagrange. He went downstairs whistling a little tune; then just at the corner of Via Roma he realised that he needed just one more thing to make him perfectly elegant. So he went into a tobacco shop and came out lighting a big gilded cigarette.

"I hope it won't do me any harm. . . . Why, I haven't smoked for nearly seventeen years because Agnes. . . ."

"Hullo!" a surprised voice hailed him.

"Volterri!"

"Brancali?"

It was an old friend of his, a stockbroker. He held out his hand laughing.

"Why, it's ages since I've seen you ! Wherever have you been all this time ?"

"I've been ill . . . I've been three months in a sanatorium."

"Well it's done you good being ill, that's all—why, you look a mere boy, you know. You are smart too—you only need a tie and then you'd look like a real gentleman !"

"Well, you don't need anything to make you *look* like a gentleman—all you can do is to behave like one."

The words shot from his lips like an arrow. The other laughed and said "Well, you're a queer fellow !" shook his hand quickly and went off.

Claudio stood there, amazed at his own ridiculous behaviour; he had really been unnecessarily and extraordinarily rude. Damn it . . . that was the sort of thing he used to say long ago when he was rather hasty and had the excuse of being young : but now . . . if Brancali had turned round and answered his injury by an insult, he would have had to slap him in the face, and goodness knows what wouldn't have happened then—a duel or something. It was too ridiculous for words.

He shook his head mournfully and then began to smile, thinking of that time when, a fortnight after taking his degree, he had slapped a journalist in the face for making some remark about politics (he was a Democrat then). It had ended in a duel and he had made a great gash in the journalist's face, somehow or other. What a damned nuisance that duel had been—he was brought before the bench and what-not. He remembered saying to the magistrate, "Well, I might just as well have got the wound myself." Then the magistrate laughed and he was acquitted—perhaps because he had said that. But they might have sentenced him. Damn it all ! And another time, also before he got married, he had run the risk of being sent to prison because he had written something in the *Avvenire* against all the silly little cliques and parties in the town, and against the Government that encouraged them,

Obviously he had had a perfectly disgusting character when he was young ; he laughed at everything and was appallingly conceited and reckless . . . well, perhaps more thoughtless than anything else, really. If Agnes' spirit had not been there to watch over him and restrain him and guide him, and to teach him to be moderate and prudent and careful, so that his character became quite different, where would he have been then ? He owed everything to his "late-espoused Saint."

He thought of Brancali and what had just happened, and whispered to himself :

"All that for just a tie !"

He put his hand up to his neck, and got very red. Agnes never could stand anyone wasting money on things one could quite well make oneself. So she used to make him ties that didn't go so badly with the clothes the little dressmaker used to make for him, but looked so ridiculously home-made and untidy on his beautiful new suit. And to think he had been so rude to poor old Brancali ! He turned round and went into a shop where he had out all the ties they had in the place and finally bought himself a dozen.

The man in the shop was a Milanese, not at all polite or pleasant, his face and his voice and everything annoyed Claudio Volterri intensely.

"How much are they ?"

"Thirty-six lire."

"No, say thirty—thirty-six is very expensive—"

The man said sniffily :

"They certainly are expensive when you compare them with the tie you've got on."

Claudio, in a fit of fury, seized the boxes, hurled them in the man's face and took a step backwards, he was ready to fight if necessary.

It was not necessary, however ; the man whined and made excuses very humbly :

"But . . . but . . . no offence meant, I'm sure, sir. . . . excuse me, sir . . . but I'm sure you agree with me. . . ."

Claudio's anger flared up again; then he felt ashamed of himself :

"No—excuse *me* ; sometimes one does let oneself go . . . I'm sorry . . . it is entirely my fault." And he bent down to help the shopkeeper pick up the ties and the boxes. The two men each tried to be more polite than the other.

"No, really, sir !"

"Don't mention it !"

"Please don't bother . . . I'm here on purpose."

"Thirty-six lire then ?"

"No, no, thirty—thirty."

"I wouldn't dream of it ; you said thirty-six, and so . . ."

At last they agreed on thirty-three and they were both satisfied. Claudio turned round again as he was going out and shook hands heartily with the shopkeeper."

"Look here, I'm truly sorry—but you know sometimes . . . my nerves aren't. . . ."

But he had to admit to himself that nerves were a very poor excuse. "Well, what was it then ? I was quite quiet and happy, and then suddenly"

Well, what could it be ?

Claudio finally had to admit, rather abashed, that he had two different natures. One, which was luckily still uppermost, was a sensible one ; the other was his old reckless headstrong nature that Agnes had so successfully repressed, and that now took advantage of her death to jump up again unexpectedly and play nasty tricks on its unfortunate owner.

From then onwards the widower watched over the student most carefully, always a little alarmed. But after all, even if he had done wrong he had made sufficient and honourable amends. He could pat himself on the back ; he had done the proper thing. He kept on saying this to himself over and over again as he stood in front of the mirror and arranged his new tie. Bibi meanwhile sniffed him suspiciously because it didn't believe its little eyes. Well, anyhow, whether he was right or not, he was at least pleased with himself and that was what mattered. He undid his tie, folded it carefully and laid it on

the bed ; then he sank into an armchair, delighting in relaxing his healthy body, and stretched his legs well out in front of him so as not to spoil the crease in his trousers.

He sat there quietly for a bit with his hands in his pockets, and dreamed away the time till he had to get ready for lunch. He began to think that a man after all is still young at forty-five, and then suddenly the wonderful spring of youth began to laugh in his spirit, he felt it flowing in his veins, swelling his strong muscles ; he felt it in his joints, and his heart was filled with the longing to live and enjoy life. He felt he must give scope to his personality that had been so long suppressed ; he must develop it and encourage it ; he must hold out his arms and stand on tip-toe with delight.

"I am young, indeed I am young ! I can walk and climb mountains ; I can go to bed at midnight and get up at five, drink another bottle, have a cold bath, do everything I want—I might even get married again if I felt like it."

He suddenly got very red and felt extremely small. Slowly he raised his eyes till they rested on Agnes' portrait that hung on the wall opposite. He was almost afraid she must have heard him talking. He was ashamed of his sudden reaction against Agnes' spirit, and then he smiled through his embarrassment. If *she* could see him from heaven, she would know that he never had the slightest intention to bring another wife into the house to take her place. Agnes was his beloved wife and he would never forget her ; his soul was full of undying devotion and gratitude towards her.

"Never, never, never ! Isn't it, Bibi ?" Then—

"Lord no, though . . . I don't pretend to be a saint. If sometimes . . . just now and then, you know . . . I've no ties now . . . but never in my own house though, never !"

He felt a little pricking in his back that worried him ; and he had ideas in his head that worried him still more although

"I'm all right," he thought. "Indeed I'm quite all right : but I'm afraid I may still have rather weak nerves. What about those things I said—getting in a temper and feeling so

restless and what not? It can't be anything but nerves. The doctor did warn me—travelling's the thing."

It really was fear of nervous trouble that sent him away for a change of air. After a rather restless night, due perhaps to drinking Grignolino on top of Valpolicella at his friend Bellati's, he decided that he would go away.

* * *

"The suit-case you mean," said Claudio's valet that morning as he came into the dressing-room, "is shut, and I think it's full too, it's ever so heavy and"

Claudio Volterri stopped brushing his teeth and tightened his dressing-gown girdle as he said, "Well, well! Just bring it into the study and we'll see."

He finished dressing, took his bunch of keys, then he wondered what the devil could be inside.

But as soon as he caught sight of the suit-case he remembered. He turned pale and muttered: "What a place to put all poor Agnes' letters! Now what shall I do?"

He opened book-cases and drawers and cupboards to find room for them but there seemed no room at all for a whole hundredweight of letters. But, damn it all, he jolly well needed the suit-case. He started thinking what a gloomy job it had been, reading over all those letters when his wife had died. He really didn't need to read them over again—partly so as not to make himself miserable about them again but mostly because he had them all indelibly imprinted in his mind. Some irreverent eyes might one day violate the sanctity of the holy words

He opened the suit-case; and sighing deeply, he looked at Bibi as if to ask his approval. Bibi shook himself gently without changing place. Then Claudio put one sheet in the fire-place and lit it, then he put on another and yet another, feeding the flame with letter after letter, little ones and big ones, square and rectangular ones, white ones and blue ones, pink ones and mauve ones. He had not the courage to take even one of them out of its envelope to read it before giving

it to the flames, keepers of every sacred remembrance, for ever and ever.

When the flame died down, he looked sadly at the blackened ashes. Then he took the suit-case and carried it into his room. He felt sad, almost despairing indeed ; but he felt satisfaction at having accomplished an unpleasant duty without flinching. He had decided, while he was looking at the letters burning, that he would start off his journey by revisiting his birthplace and see his relations and his wife's relations all living together in his old home after so many, many years. He felt elated at the thought that he could take a little present for everyone ; and since he was a reasonable man and not merely selfish, he thought it was wrong to keep all poor dear Agnes' things—her brooches and chains and earrings and bracelets—shut up in a drawer, all for himself ; and it was even more wrong to hoard them there . . . whom was he hoarding them for like that ? It would be much better to share them out between his sisters and sisters-in-law, nieces and cousins, so that everyone who had known poor dear Agnes could have something to remember her by, and would go on blessing her even after she was dead.

This time he was really delighted with himself, and he felt quite overcome with emotion. He shook his left hand with his right and his eyes filled with tears. "Good old Claudio," he said, "Well done indeed !"

So he went back to the little town in the Monferrato where he had been born. But he was soon sorry he went back. It wasn't that he thought it an ugly place—no, on the contrary, it was charming except for those appalling streets where you couldn't make a step forward without sinking into the mud ; otherwise there was nothing but good to be said about the place. He felt proud of the magnificent rolling hills all garlanded with vines, round the white houses that climbed the slope to the castle. It wasn't that his relations and friends had not welcomed him properly. No indeed ; they had all come out to receive him and made a great fuss of him ; everyone wanted him to come and see them, and if they couldn't

get him to come to a meal, they insisted on his sitting at their table just for a moment to drink a bottle of wine with them. But all the same it looked as if his friends and relations had made a conspiracy against him to make him feel ashamed of himself. They kept reminding him of his wild student days and of Agnes' innumerable virtues, on every possible occasion, and sometimes both at the same time, so that he sometimes felt more pleased about his old harum-scarum behaviour than about the admiration they all felt for Agnes. So the poor widower had to be particularly careful not to let the old cock in him get up and crow when no one expected it. To make matters worse, he just happened to have arrived when the election was on. The people's Democratic party was absolutely at a loose end because their candidate had died suddenly and there was no one to stand against the Moderate-Clerical party candidate, who had won the seat since time immemorial.

Claudio Volterri had never paid any attention to politics since that time when he had given that unfortunate slap to the journalist under the university porches and had nearly been sent to prison for his *Avvenire* articles. Then one day, when he was at his brother's house, who should turn up but Ottavio Berta, his old prep. school friend? He was tall and thin as a lath, and wore a huge red tie. He was President of the Workers' Union and the town club *Angelo Brofferio*; he was also a personal enemy of Rebandego, the member of parliament. Claudio knew all this; but he never in the least expected him to say what he did.

"You know" (he used the familiar "tu" although there was no reason why he should address Claudio like that) "that this town is unfortunately represented in parliament by the Right Honourable *Licet*! Now I'll tell you why they call him the Right Honourable *Licet*. Because he's never said a single word in twenty years at Montecitorio although here he makes such a fuss and talks so much because he knows that there's no one but fools to listen. But once, at the very beginning of his time in the House, he held up his hand; and the Speaker said: "Let the Right Honourable member be heard!" But he only

wanted to go to the lavatory ; and that's why they call him the Right Honourable *Licet*. . . . Well anyhow we're absolutely sick of him and we don't want him to be our member any longer."

"That's right," Claudio approved.

"That's what I was waiting for," shouted Ottavio Berta, seizing his hand enthusiastically. It's not just my idea ; you're the man we want. You were born here, you're an educated man and a barrister, everyone likes you—we couldn't find a better candidate even if we had one made on purpose."

"What ?" said Volterri, taken aback.

Berta said solemnly :

"Democracy gives its banner into your keeping !"

Then Claudio really thought that Berta was joking and slapped him on the back, laughing loudly.

"Well, you're an odd bird ! Couldn't you find anyone better to play a joke on than a poor creature who doesn't know the slightest bit about politics—why I don't even remember what 'Democracy' and 'Socialists' mean."

Berta winked, waved his hand in the air and whistled discreetly.

"Ts, ts, ts—do you want us to believe that ? What about your duel and your articles in the *Avvenire* ? Do you think we've forgotten all that ? You're too clever by half ! Listen—" and he started making little gestures in the air, "Do you think all men are equal ?"

"Yes, just about"

"Do you think workmen are all animals ?"

"Well, if they're drunk"

"And you—you who've studied so much—you wouldn't be ashamed of drinking a bottle of Barbera at the 'Wheatsheaf,' would you ?"

"What are you thinking about ?"

"Well, all I can say is, if you're not a Democrat, *porcu faus*, there isn't such a thing as democracy."

"I may be a Democrat all right," said Claudio, a little worried at this everlasting joke. "But I'm a quiet sort of

person, I like to be quiet : I never wanted to quarrel with anyone. . . .”

Then Ottavio Berta gave a great guffaw, and slapped his knees with his long hands as he laughed ; at last he wiped his eyes and said, still laughing spasmodically :

“Whatever are you talking about ? What, don’t you know that when a little boy in the town here gets up to some trick or other his mother says he’s worse than Claudio Volterri ?”

Poor Volterri hesitated, divided between pride and mortification ; and meanwhile that creature Ottavio took the opportunity to press his point.

“It isn’t only Democracy—it’s your own native land that is crying for help ! Have you a heart of stone ? What about your old school friend who’s spoken for you to everyone ? Look here . . . I don’t ask you to tell me at once ; I’ll only say just this one thing. This evening the Right Honourable *Licet* is reading his election address in the theatre. Come and hear whether you think your own town deserves such an appalling fate ; come and hear and *then* decide ; but you simply *must* come !”

* * *

Claudio thought he had been let off lightly, and promised to go. He did go, too, since he had promised : he was annoyed about it, but still he went. Whoever would have thought, though, that that devil of an Ottavio would have played him such a disgusting trick ? But the fact remains that the moment Claudio came into his box and leaned out, a great burst of applause rose from the theatre, and everyone got up and began shouting : “Long live our fellow citizen ! Long live the true Democrat !”

Even Rebandego’s followers shouted and clapped because they thought all the enthusiasm was for their candidate. Claudio got very red and bowed, very much embarrassed ; but he felt rather proud all the same at the way people acclaimed him. After a few moments he had to turn round and thank people the other way because a crowd of people led by

Ottavio Berta came surging into his box. Berta seemed to be pouring delight from his open mouth, and insisted that all his friends should come and sit there close to Volterri and enjoy the honour of his company too.

Just then the Right Honourable gentleman Rebandego appeared on the stage, in front of the flags and the committee, and came up towards the footlights. He was greeted by a fresh burst of applause that rather offended poor Claudio.

He was a tiny little round man ; he looked like a barrel with the cork sticking out. He talked "like a dog" though ; "like a dog," Volterri kept repeating, frowning at him as he rested his forehead on his hands, and his elbows on the front of the box. "And he said perfectly disgusting things, too—not to speak of his grammar. The less said about his manner the better—but as for his matter, good Lord ! Why, if he didn't run down Garibaldi and the martyrs just to prove his agreement with the priests was all right !"

Claudio was so indignant that he let out, in a loud whisper, "It's too much—by God, it is !"

Berta, who heard him, yelled the words at the top of his voice, "It's too much—by God it is !"

All the theatre was thrown into such confusion that the speaker lost the string of his thoughts and to give himself time to collect himself he stuck out his little paunch assertively and declared :—

"I am telling you now what I think ; if anyone wants to argue he can ask me about it afterwards."

Then Ottavio Berta nearly flung himself out of the box in his excitement, waved his long arms wildly in the air and screamed at the top of his voice :

"Well, I'll ask you about it !"

Then he sat down quietly and rubbed his hands, delighted at his gesture. "They'll know what's what when they hear Volterri—these damned sons of priests !"

"Me ?" Claudio asked, terrified.

"I spoke for you."

Claudio would rather anything but that had happened ; but

Berta looked so funny he could not help laughing ; he could quite well manage to slip out anyhow as soon as that little barrel of a man had finished shouting. "What a nasty little creature, though . . . what a complete idiot !" If he'd been alone with him somewhere instead of in public, he would have talked to him for his good : he would have said : "Well, do you really think that ?"

Now what was happening ? Whom was he denouncing so violently ? Yes—that's it—he was looking up at the box ! Was he talking to him ? Insults, what ? Oh—you son of a bitch ! There—there—he was making off without giving him the time to answer in ! Splendid, though ! People were quite right to be hissing—the damned fool—he doesn't know how to behave and he doesn't know . . . that's right, that's right—hiss away !

It wasn't just hissing ; the whole theatre was in an uproar. Everyone was standing up and yelling ; some people followed the poor speaker, hissing furiously ; some looked up to Volterri's box and shouted enthusiastically : "Three cheers for Volterri ! Speech, speech ! Volterri—Volterri—three cheers for Volterri !" "

Behind him Ottavio Berta was waving his long arms about and begging for silence. Volterri felt himself carried away by the popular enthusiasm ; he wasn't himself any longer ; he seemed to be burning with a fire that longed to flame fiercely ; a rush of feelings overwhelmed him, and he felt he must give vent to them now.

He could not remember in the least afterwards what he had said that evening ; he only remembered the storms of applause and shouts and stamping that intoxicated him and gave him courage and strength, and the wild outbursts of popular enthusiasm that welled up round him, immeasurably thrilling, as soon as he had finished speaking. People shook his hands and embraced him and chaired him ; they carried him right out of the theatre and all through the town, shouting all the way. The roads were lined with people carrying torches ; there were fireworks too, and behind came the *Angelo Brofferio*

society singing Garibaldi's hymn lustily. The procession advanced triumphantly towards the Volterris' house ; all his relations, men, women and children, leaned out of the windows and shouted with tears in their eyes as the conquering hero returned.

Now, after this, how could he possibly refuse to stand ? He simply had to accept ; so he threw himself whole-heartedly into the business. All his friends were amazed to see him so efficient and decided, but he had long ago given up being amazed. He spoke at all the public meetings and in all the villages in the constituency, and although he had a kind of idea that it was wiser not to stir up quarrels or disputes, some little devil seemed to spur him on and encourage him ; so he followed his rival about looking for opportunities of discomfiting him and of having his own back on all the insults he had suffered ; he longed to tell Rebandego quite frankly what he thought of him.

He followed him so persistently that poor Rebandego got quite alarmed and finally gave up public speaking altogether. Now Volterri was perfectly satisfied ; the possibility of his winning the seat had never even entered his head.

Whoever would have thought it ? He actually *was* elected—and with a majority of 850 votes too !

Poor Claudio was absolutely bowled over by emotion and humiliation. Humiliation—indeed he was humiliated. He was a sensible and conscientious person, and he knew perfectly well he would make an extraordinarily bad member of parliament ; he didn't want his town to have another member like Rebandego. But perhaps because he was fully aware of his own deficiencies he turned out to be an excellent statesman ; he never bothered anyone and no one ever bothered him.

* * *

He didn't spend all his days in the House or on Standing Committees planning laws and what not ; he had no intention of getting into the Cabinet or leading a political party either.

But when he had overcome his diffidence and amazement and shame at having been somehow or other elected to represent his electors in parliament, he began to realise that he had just as much right to be there as nine-tenths of the other people. He put all uselessly ambitious notions out of his head and set himself to do his duty quietly and sensibly without betraying the confidence that had been put in him, and putting the interests of his electors before everything else. Everything had conspired to send him into a political party whose beliefs, luckily, agreed pretty much with all his other ideas—or at least with the ideas he had held a good while ago and which he had never altered or added to much since. There was nothing of the neophyte or apostate about him, and since age and thought and prudence (or so he thought) had tempered the exaggeration of the views he had held as a young man, he shunned the limelight, and instead of joining the most advanced section of his party he had drifted into the more moderate side. When he had hesitated for a moment as to whether he should choose the first and lowest seat on the extreme left of the house, he suddenly thought of some fool he had known at the university who always used to sit in the first row so that he could nod approvingly at everything the lecturer was saying. He was so afraid of being like him that he went and sat in the second row instead, just near the steps ; and that was how he chose the place that was far the most suitable for him without really knowing what he was doing. He had chosen a place just between the members who invariably voted for the Government and the members who invariably voted against it, just on the border line between the people whom the Government didn't bother about because they always agreed with it as a matter of course, and the other people who annoyed it profoundly because it could not and would not be convinced. And the Right Honourable member at Montecitorio, who was certainly no fool, realised at once that the ministers always addressed the majority benches when they were making speeches and wanted applause, but when they were arguing and trying to convince

people they turned towards his part of the House and kept looking from right to left at the little steps beside him. And very often they looked at him as if they attached some special weight to his opinion or as if they particularly wanted to convince him of their point ; he might be on the side of the opposition, but he was very intelligent and honest all the same. Even the Under-Secretaries of State seemed to vie with each other in being charming to him, and gave him sweet smiles and handshakes in the lobbies and the passages and the dispensary, as if they wanted to say : "Will you be so kind as to ask a favour of me ? A decoration ? Or some help—or a promotion ?—or an appointment ? Or a good word for the railways in your constituency ?"

Claudio Volterri, who was so extraordinarily kind-hearted, granted these favours willingly to the Under-Secretaries of State and also to his electors.

But naturally the people who were really delighted were his electors. All their private interests and all their public affairs were promptly and efficiently dealt with, and besides that their member answered all their letters personally ; he seemed to have time for everything. He invited his friends and his friends' friends to his house and listened to all their grievances and he even shewed them the sights of the town, with the same resigned grace with which he had once taken Bibi for walks at a fixed hour every day so as not to offend dear Agnes' memory. In his constituency he was extraordinarily popular ; he was adored and revered and beloved in a way which is only possible in a little wine-growing country town.

Claudio enjoyed life in those days. At first he was rather bored in the great unknown city. He felt the loneliness ; he was rather afraid of what would happen next day and generally felt rather uncomfortable, so that he thought it best to go to bed very early in the evening. But after a bit things changed. He had no idea that life could have been so pleasant, or the solemn life of a member of parliament could be so easily combined with a gay and reckless bachelor existence.

An amusing member from Emilia called Tari had launched him in his new life. He was a Socialist and a business man ; he was about Volterri's age, with the same rather reddish moustache, but otherwise he was shorter and stouter, full of life and energy. He had taken a great liking to Volterri and introduced him to artists and authors, to unconventional men and even more unconventional women. He took him with him to restaurants and theatres, to gambling hells and night clubs.

"Really," Claudio Volterri had told him, "I shouldn't like to"

"What wouldn't you like to . . . ?"

Claudio had meant to say that the respect in which he held Agnes' memory kept him from amusing himself too much ; but instead he said :

"I shouldn't like to meet anyone I knew . . . I'm a widower, you see."

"You've got health and wealth, and you're a widower ; why you've got all the luck."

Then he saw from Claudio's face that he had made a *faux-pas* and smiled :

"What I really meant was, with all due respect to your loss, that to be a widower is the absolutely ideal state for a man who wants to be popular. Then women think you are free and they have a sort of guarantee that you're serious and reliable . . . and those are things they must believe in if they're to trust you. You're in exactly the same position as a priest, if you'll excuse my saying so—so you'd better take advantage of it."

Claudio had taken advantage of it ; prudently and wisely, of course, for how could he forget those virtues of prudence and wisdom that Agnes had so carefully taught him ? Finally he came to the point of not feeling any remorse for his behaviour, because really after all—I mean, everybody can't be a saint, can they ?—just once in a while you know . . . when one has no ties . . . ! It wasn't at all the same thing as bringing a woman back to his house and making her take Agnes' place. That he would never dream of doing.

He repeated—he would never dream of doing it at home. At home he just had his valet (he had left the cook behind at Turin) and Bibi, the little dog. He had refused to be separated from Bibi ; he would not even give it to his sister, who had asked for it beseechingly as a living remembrance of dear Agnes. Perhaps he had made a mistake in not letting her have Bibi ; he admitted it sadly and bitterly, almost remorsefully—he had perhaps made a mistake.

It wasn't because Bibi scabbled up the carpets and spoilt the plush on the chairs and the sofa, and tore the drawing-room cushions and barked whenever he heard the piano or a barrel-organ, although he did all these naughty things ; but the Roman climate seemed to have accentuated one of his little faults that had always annoyed Claudio intensely even when his wife was alive. It wasn't so bad at Turin where so few people came to the house but here . . .

You see, that wretched little creature that wouldn't go outside except on a lead because it was so afraid of other dogs, was a real little savage indoors. As long as the visitor stayed sitting down, and looked at Bibi straight in the face, the little dog stared back, perhaps just growling a little ; but as soon as the poor visitor got up to go or turned round, Bibi went up to them quietly and bit their legs or if not, at least ruined their trousers. So if anyone ever came several times to Volterri's house, he had to go out backwards, with that devilish little black dog's nose following him as irrevocably as the hand of fate.

"Here, Bibi.—Damn you, Bibi !"

Ottavio Berta had come to Rome on purpose to persuade Volterri to support him in a civil case at the Cavour assizes ; and even good old Berta, tall and thin as a lath with his big scarf knotted round his neck and his long lanky arms, had talked to him about it. It was true Berta looked rather odd but still it was nothing to laugh at. The dog had come up to him just when the servant was opening the door, and the poor man, who really showed more commonsense than you would ever have expected from him—much, much more—turned

round on his heel and leaned down, his hands on his bended knees. Then he addressed the little black snarling face :—

“Listen, animal ; you expect too much of my friendship for your master. Another time I shall break your jaw with a good kick.”

He stood up and shook Claudio’s hand warmly.

“Please don’t be sorry, my dear fellow. But just listen to me. Really a dog like that isn’t fit for a democratic member of parliament.”

Berta was quite right ; a dog like that wasn’t at all suitable. He wished he *had* given it to his sister now. It is all very well having animals in the country, but in a tiny little flat in town . . . well, it was really cruel keeping them there at all.

* * *

He was even more worried at the time of the summer recess when he decided to go and spend part of the time at Gogna di Cadore with his friends the Bellatis. They had kept on pressing him to go and now he really meant to keep his promise. “Only what the devil shall I do with the dog ?”

He could not find anyone to look after it, although he was willing to pay, so he had to take Bibi with him to the Cadore. After all he was glad he took his dog because there at Gogna there was staying the noble family from Vicenza, friends of the Bellatis. There was the widowed mother, Donna Cristina Redaelli, and her two daughters ; they all took a great liking to Bibi and made such a fuss of him that at last they managed to make friends with the nasty little beast.

The elder of the two daughters, Clelia, seemed to have a special affection, almost a passion, for Bibi. Perhaps it was her affection or her lumps of sugar or her soft voice when she spoke, but whatever it was Bibi obeyed her implicitly, rushed up to meet her whining with delight, he lay quietly curled up on a stool, with his black nose in the air, and his lovely eyes wide open, and seemed to listen as if he really understood it when Clelia said : “Was it a darling then, was it ? A nice clever little dog that knows everything ; and he knows he

isn't at home but in an hotel, in an hotel, darling, doesn't he ? so he mustn't scramble on the chairs with his little paws, no, he mustn't, not as if he wanted to make his bed on the plush. Listen, listen, Bibi ! And he mustn't bark for nothing, not if they play the piano ; and he mustn't bite people's legs . . . never, never, never, you bad little beast !"

Wasn't she adorable ?

She wasn't exactly young—She must be . . . let's see . . . about twenty-eight or at most twenty-nine ; and she wasn't really pretty either, only she was rather charming, and her figure . . . His friend Tari would have said she was like a horse, with those long, delicate, strong thighs of hers. You could see she was well-bred too. She had poise and breeding, pride and sweetness, she was a fine figure of a woman, with a lovely contralto voice that was full of dignity and strength.

But she was unfortunate all the same. His friends the Bellatis were quite right when they praised her and were sorry for her at the same time. She was noble and poor—in other words, poor twice over ! He quite saw why she hesitated about signing a contract with a Milanese impresario who would have given her enough to live on and possibly the chance of getting rich. But if her mother died and she had nowhere to live . . . ?

Wasn't she charming, though ?

She was so charming and so lovable that Claudio Volterri felt it a duty as well as a pleasure to be her friend. He stayed beside her whenever they went on long walks in the Ansiei or the Piave Valleys, or in the Gogna woods all scented with cyclamen, or higher up towards Misurina and Cortina d'Ampezzo, along the winding roads where you saw the *Corno del Dose* and the *Sorapis* towering above you. He listened and encouraged her to confide in him, and so little by little she began to unfold her shy nature that stood so much in need of love and of sympathy.

So between them there grew up a charming friendship, made all the more delightful by the fact that he had discovered (he had been told so many times) he had a delicate

and sensitive nature, rather reticent and reserved, but open to warmth and emotion in spite of it. He had a refined and penetrating intelligence highly strung and aristocratic, which is extraordinarily rare nowadays when everyone is in such a hurry, and interested in nothing but getting on and getting rich. He was just the person to understand her ; they were soul-mates, bound together by a mystical bond of union.

It was this feeling perhaps that led her to murmur one day, when she was speaking to Bibi and Claudio was there :

"Darling, you're not mine, you're not mine ! But I wouldn't like you to belong to anyone but him, darling, no, I wouldn't!"

Then she looked up at her friend with her great clear sad eyes, and said :

"At Vicenza I've got a lovely Persian cat—but I'd give him to you if you'd give me a share in Bibi."

Then she blushed violently and smiled quickly when she saw Claudio's expression of amazement.

"No, no . . . you don't see what I mean ! I mean . . . I should like Bibi to belong to you and to me . . . to both of us together."

Volterri thought "Why, take him—take him altogether," delighted at getting rid of his little dog so easily. But instead (actuated by prudence, the wish to make his present seem more worth while, and a kind of purely platonic coquettishness) he said sadly :

"My poor wife was so fond of him . . ."

"Oh . . ." Clelia said, looking at him out of her great sad deep eyes that seemed to be saying, "Oh I know . . . I know. And because you love him, my friend, I love him too. Because he means so much to you—because he represents something sacred and precious bequeathed to you by your dear wife—I admire her so much too—I should like you to esteem me a little . . . I should like to feel worthy of . . ."

There were tears in her eyes and Claudio was profoundly moved at her emotion. He murmured "Signorina Clelia, take him for the sake of our friendship ; there is no one else in the world who can . . . who can . . . Please take him !"

How adorably the girl looked at him just then ! She couldn't have been more grateful if he had given her a fortune. And her mother and sister both came to thank him, all mysterious and fluttering with emotion, as if he had done them a kindness that he wanted no one to know anything about.

"Funny life is," Claudio said to himself. "They've done *me* a favour and it looks as if I'd rescued them from something, they're so grateful."

They had indeed done him a favour. It really seemed as if getting of that beastly little dog was the one thing he needed to make him happy ; and now he was happy. The mountains, the air and the long walks he took gave him back all his youthful joy and vigour. He had a good appetite ; he had never felt so young before in his life. Life was glorious just then. Breathing, eating, walking ; the sun, the fresh air, the scent of forests and of flowers, were all an undiluted pleasure. If he felt active, he wandered about in the valley or climbed the slopes, alone or with his friends, and if he felt lazy, he stretched himself out in an armchair in his room, with his feet on the desk, and dipped into the newspaper or a book that Signorina Clelia had lent him. Then he dozed a little and listened, half waking, to the Ansiei's silvery voice as it leapt splashing playfully from rock to rock. When he emerged from his room he was greeted by smiling women and friendly handshakes ; the hotel-keeper came up bowing ceremoniously to the Right Honourable member who honoured the humble hotel by his presence.

He had never thought life in an hotel could be so pleasant. It was quite an ideal life. He enjoyed it all the more because it reminded him he was free and because he knew that although this particular phase of his life might end at any moment, it would be followed by another equally agreeable phase. First he would be at home, then at Turin and then at Rome again where he would see his friend Tari and go to the theatre and all his old *rendezvous*. . .

That was really the only thing one missed at Gogna. You had to be satisfied with the company of the other visitors

in the evening, everybody getting together in the big music room. And if Signorina Clelia did not sing or if her sister didn't play the piano, then you had to listen patiently to the brave deeds that Pre Mariano (that patriotic priest who wore a long garment rather incongruously on his athletic body) used to tell about ; or else you had to listen to Professor Fanolli's appallingly dull conversation. He was a great tall angular creature gone quite dotty over climbing ; he used invariably to wear knickerbockers, and he had a long, long nose that made people call him *Pinocchio* ; he wasn't really so stupid, only he had no tact and no discretion ; he was as spiteful and foul-mouthed as a monkey.

But then when Claudio got too bored, he used to wander out of the room and go and sit on the verandah in a cane chair. After a little while Signorina Clelia used to come out there and sit, and talk about Chopin and Fogazzaro and Maeterlinck and Edouard Schuré. It was the same sort of thing that she talked about in the day time when they went for walks in the woods and her mother made the other girl and Signora Bellati lag behind so that Claudio and Clelia could go on ahead together. But in the evening, when the Ansiei murmured gently as it fell, and the larches rustled, they sat under the great dark shadows, with the mountains all around them, and a shooting star would streak the heavy darkness, then their conversation seemed different and more intimate. They confided in each other and told each other their thoughts ; the poor girl talked about her sadness ; and everything seemed so intimate, so mysteriously dreaming and lovely, that Claudio Volterri's romantic soul was filled with emotion and he felt an overwhelming desire to comfort the poor little tormented soul that *Fate* had treated so hardly, by administering words of *wisdom*.

Claudio Volterri had been reading Maeterlinck.

"Oh I was never meant for this life !" she used to say.

On those dim starlit nights while her sister Angelica played a Schumann elegy softly : "But wisdom makes us acquiesce in our fate. I am poor, and I bear a noble name . . . I would

go into a convent if I felt it was my vocation . . . but I don't. I'm much too proud and too sensitive to marry just anyone ; and I'm so unlucky . . . I don't suppose the sort of ideal man every sensitive girl dreams of—a man with delicate sensibilities and real understanding—will ever come my way. I think . . . don't you think so ? . . . I think the only thing I can do is to go on the stage."

"No indeed, Signorina Clelia ! You are much too sensitive and frail to take up a career like that—all fraught with difficulties and danger and disappointment. We must each fulfil our destiny ; don't endanger yours by taking such a step . . . you will see . . . life has a reward in store for you—a reward that befits your worth and your beauty. Wait patiently, and the time will come ; the time always does come, and you're so young, you can afford to wait—Believe me ; I am old, compared with you."

"A girl of nearly thirty is so much older than a man of forty-two. And then you tell me to wait. . . What shall I wait for ? Nowadays there's no one brave enough to fall in love with a poor girl, almost penniless, and marry her—and one who's got an old mother to look after too, and a younger sister who may get married of course, but . . ."

"Good Lord—the mother and sister as well !" Claudio thought, and he could think of nothing else to say because that nosy creature Professor Fanolli appeared on the doorstep, leaning forward with his hands in his knickerbocker pockets, and whistling a sentimental comic song that emphasised the knowing look in his eyes.

"That man's following me !" Claudio said to himself, turning round quickly in his cane chair and staring at the professor. He felt as if he would shout "You are an old idiot, you know !" but he didn't because Fanolli came up innocently as if he had only just seen Claudio, and said : "What, you here too ? At your service, Signorina ! What wonderful stars to-night !"

And he hummed :

"Night of love !
The stars above"

"Nasty sneaking creature . . ." Volterri thought, and said nothing. Then he went off furiously. He felt his . . . well, his student soul flaring up within him.

But the next morning it really looked as if Signorina Clelia and he could go on with their conversation just as if they had never been interrupted. She was saying, with a sigh :

"Oh, I know all the snares and delusions of life on the stage I shan't make up my mind without . . . without . . . a lot of heart-burning. No . . . I've no vocation . . . I can't go into a convent ! I'm too unlucky . . . I'm too poor ; I mustn't expect the man I should like . . . a man with delicate sensibilities and high moral sense . . ."

She spoke very, very slowly, her hands cupping her chin ; her voice was so sad, it seemed she must weep. Claudio felt his innermost being stirred by her words, and he thought :

"She is charming . . . she is so charming. And really a lady. No . . . I am not noble . . . I can't be the man with delicate sensibilities and high moral sense she is waiting for . . . but . . ."

She went on meanwhile :

" . . . And not too young—someone who knows what life is and could help to bear its difficulties without illusions but without cynicism. So what am I to do ?"

Then a ridiculous little voice sang out from the door :

"The voice that breathed o'er Eden,
That earliest wedding day,
The primal marriage blessing,
It hath not passed away."

"Good Lord !" muttered Claudio Volterri. He seized the arms of the chair and half got up, and glared angrily at Fanolli, who had just come on to the verandah arm in arm with Pre Mariano.

"Well I'm damned. Once upon a time they used dogs as detectives ; now I see they use donkeys as well."

Fanolli seemed to expect Claudio to explain what he meant, because he asked innocently :

"Are you angry with *me*, sir ?"

"It's no honour for me and no pleasure either—but unfortunately I'm talking to *you*."

"And if I'm not mistaken you called me a donkey and a spy in the same sentence!"

"It never entered my highest expectations that you could understand me so well."

Clelia screamed and fainted. Pre Mariano made a sort of barking noise that was quite unintelligible; everyone came running to the door to see what was the matter.

"As for this gentleman, I let him off lightly. Good-bye."

Claudio had stopped being angry with Fanolli, but he was furious with himself. That damned student in him had taken his hand and led him straight into a ridiculous situation where he had lost all his statesman-like dignity. His dear Agnes had warned him, over and over again . . . And he had behaved like a beast and thrown out ugly words to right and to left, like a rude little boy. The result was that a lady had fainted, all the hotel was turned upside down, everyone was in a bad temper, there would be another unnecessary duel, just like the one twenty years ago; his whole existence was upset . . . and now he might get shot in the stomach or something. Because if Fanolli, who was used to shooting deer and game, chose pistols, he could easily shoot him just where he liked.

"Good, Claudio, good, that's always something."

And he rubbed his hands vigorously, as if he were really delighted.

Things went better than he had expected. Bellati managed to persuade the other seconds to choose swords.

Claudio was extraordinarily composed when he found himself opposite such a skilful opponent. The Professor dashed across the clearing in the wood and in no time was right up to him, nose and sword complete. Claudio struck him once on his shoulder with the flat side of the sword; then he gave Claudio a scratch on the wrist, nothing at all to make a fuss about but just enough to stop the duel going on.

"Sir," Fanolli said respectfully, "allow me to shake hands. I have been wondering for a long time just why you were

offended ; and it doesn't really matter if I don't understand—but now I feel I must tell you, on my word, I never had the slightest intention of being disrespectful, either by word or deed, to you or to anyone—you all deserve my highest esteem and indeed I esteem you."

"Thank you . . . I . . . I am very sorry indeed I offended you, and I hope you will forgive me now you have given me the punishment I deserved."

He laughed and shook the Professor's hand so vigorously that he protested, "Please . . . be careful . . . you'll make your wound worse."

"No, no . . . it's just a scratch !"

But there was nothing to be done about it. Fanolli insisted on helping the surgeon to disinfect and wash the wound and tie it up ; he then accompanied Claudio back to the hotel in the car ; they seemed to have become the best of friends.

"He is rather a dear," Claudio thought. "Whoever next calls him *Pinocchio* . . . !"

And the Professor kept reminding him, as he went away—"Now be careful, keep it well bandaged."

"It's absurd—just a scratch . . ."

It was just a scratch ; it was quite absurd, but he felt very proud of himself, wearing his arm in a sling, and he became quite celebrated about it. He was surrounded with smiling, sighing, inquiring women. And the Redaelli ! They treated him just as if he had saved Clelia from drowning or from a fire ; and as for her, she was wild with excitement whenever he was near. The Redaelli gave him all the care and the attention and the thought that a mother bestows on her sick son ; and they gave him soothing words and glances, smiles of love and admiration as well.

"Now do be careful—don't go and catch cold."

"Do take my shawl . . ."

"Don't get up too early."

"It's getting late ; I should go to bed if I were you."

"Beef might disagree with you—have a little fowl instead."

"What about flowers? Don't you like the smell of cyclamen?"

"Cigars—good gracious, what are you thinking about?"

It was really like having twice Agnes all round him at once ! It was too much of a good thing ; sometimes he really felt as if he couldn't bear it. It is all very well being grateful ; but you can be killed by kindness. It was nice having Signorina Clelia there—she was so sweet and charming : but what on earth did the other two want to be there as well ?

* * *

What *was* the matter with them ?

He knew one day when he had escaped from their care and was lying alone on the mossy ground of the Gogna woods, away from the road, and was enjoying the quiet and the solitude. Donna Cristina Redaelli and Bellati's wife went by quite close to him without seeing him ; they were talking eagerly to one another :

"But has he said anything ? Has he proposed ?" Signora Bellati was asking.

"Oh no . . . I think he must be really very shy. But I think it's almost settled—after all it really . . . Well, after he's fought a duel for her, don't you know . . . it really would be disgraceful if he didn't ; it does seem rather compromising, don't you think ?

As soon as they were safely past, he sat up ferociously.

Damn it though ! Whatever wouldn't they think of next ? Why, after he'd risked his life for the woman's daughter, she thanked him like that—she accused him of having put her in a compromising position ! Disgraceful, was it ?

But after all—he must confess . . . yes, he really had put Signorina Clelia in a compromising position : her mother's words helped to explain Fanolli's remarks after the duel, and the behaviour of all the visitors who really seemed to imagine he was engaged to Signorina Redaelli.

"It's getting serious," he admitted.

It was serious, but he admitted it without being at all gloomy or depressed about it. To tell the truth he was not even surprised. He had perhaps sometimes pretended to be

surprised at himself, rather as if he wanted to run away from his real personality. But he was really honest and he knew that although he had never seriously thought of getting married again, he had often thought how perfectly charming Clelia was when she spoke and complained with her tearful dignity. Goodness knows what he might not have said on the verandah that night if Fanolli had not come along and interrupted him just at the critical moment.

So, to be quite sincere, he was a little startled—because this sort of thing always is a trifle startling—but nothing more than startled. It was rather a pleasant feeling, too ; tender and ingratiating. He felt rather emancipated, and pleased with himself in a quiet way. There really was something to be pleased about, too ; a man of forty-five isn't always so attractive to a girl of twenty-eight . . . or, let's say twenty-nine at the outside. And what a girl, too !

At first he had felt rather hesitating about it ; but now Donna Cristina's words had cleared away his doubts and assured him that he was expected to propose, that he would be listened to with joy and love and thankfulness. This certainly made him happy. He was not exactly in love with Clelia ; but that was not the point. He liked her, though : he more than liked her, he was fond of her. And he admired and respected her enormously. He knew that a man of forty-five must begin to think about the future seriously ; he must think about his old age, about the horror of being alone. A loving and intelligent companion would cheer up his house and light it up with her smile and her care.

But Claudio was held back by an unpleasant little feeling he had ; something seemed to say to him : "My dear fellow, you've had all those beautiful thoughts before, twenty years ago ; and now look where you are ! When the time had come for enjoying the result of your patience and all the troubles of married life, then your poor Agnes . . . ! So you were left alone in spite of all your foresight. You see where prudence can land you ! And now you want to begin all over again, do you ? Well, well, well . . . you think it's a splendid

idea just now ; but we'll just see what you have to say about it in ten years' time when your young woman is thirty-eight. God preserve you from making a fool of yourself ! ”

And another voice said :

“Yes, talk about what will happen in ten years' time if you like ; but don't think ill of that dear creature. Just think . . . in ten years' time you may be ill and bedridden, in a cold house, all alone . . . ”

“Your sanatorium then, where in the world can you find a woman who will look after you as well as your beloved doctor, and your French nuns, all quiet and never grumbling. You fool—you know perfectly well wives aren't made for nursing you when you're ill ! ”

Then Claudio was quite pleased to be able to stop thinking and declare quite firmly that he *had* put Signorina Clelia in a compromising situation and that he *must* do his duty by her now.

When he got back he found his friend Bellati standing in the courtyard of the hotel between two great vases of oleanders. Bellati waved at him gaily and said, with a laugh :

“Well, my friend, congratulations ! ”

Claudio “got very red,” thinking he was referring to Clelia, and said cautiously :

“What's happened ? ”

“There's a telegram for you . . . and as it's all nonsense about telegrams being secret, I can tell you that the telegram comes from Cavour and the President wants you to go for an interview with him. Here, waiter ! bring this gentleman his telegram ! ”

The waiter came up beaming and bearing the yellow envelope on a tray, while Claudio smiled and shrugged his shoulders. He opened the paper and read it.

“Berta ! ” the wily Bellati grinned. “What an old fox, that man Giolitti ! He's the man who counts in the Government now—Berta indeed ! Listen—if you're made Chancellor of the Exchequer, remember me.”

Claudio could and ought to have disillusioned him and told

him that Berta was not Giolitti at all, but one of his electors who had a case on before the court at Cavour and who had the idea that because Volterri was a barrister he must go and plead for him, so he was wiring "Urgent must consult expect immediately . . ."

But he felt quite elated ; he was delighted that anyone should believe he was able to accept or refuse—yes, certainly refuse—a place in the Cabinet. He said nothing and made an evasive gesture, while Bellati asked :

"Well, anyhow, you'll be back again in a day or two, won't you ?"

"You are in a hurry !" Volterri answered with a smile. I'm not even sure I shall go. In fact I rather think I shan't !"

"Well, politics is a funny business," his friend said incredulously, and watched Claudio going off solemnly towards the staircase ; he was full of respect for the statesman's official reticence.

* * *

That evening Claudio Volterri had a glimpse of what power must be like, and assumed the dignified heartiness of a typical statesman. In the midst of all those people who stared at him as though they expected him to be made an Under-Secretary of State at least, he felt superior and benevolent at the same time, condescending and reserved. His Olympian attitude became him so well that he was in no hurry to disabuse them, and there was no need to because no one dared to ask about it, no one (what luck there were no journalists there), not even Clelia.

But he saw in her eyes pride and emotion, a sort of anxiety bordering on torment and despair. It seemed wicked not to undeceive her ; but ever since the evening before the duel there seemed to have been a tacit agreement between them, and they had not been alone on the terrace again. He did not quite see now how he could draw her aside and speak to her. She, however, saw a way, and came up to him as he stood in the recess by a window, while the other young men

and girls clustered round the piano discussing which dances they should have next.

She said to him : "Whatever happens, you won't forget your friend, will you ?"

And she looked at him with such a melting glance that he was quite overcome and very nearly said : "No, no, I'm not going away at all ; I'd refuse a hundred offices for your sake."

But somehow a proposal just then did not seem suitable at all, and then there was a collection of girls coming up to talk to Clelia, he could only stammer, "Oh, signorina."

What a fool he was ! "Oh, signorina !" indeed, just as if he had been a schoolboy ! He was positively disgusted with himself. And later on, when he was just going off to sleep in his great double bed (it was much too big for one person) he kept thinking of himself saying "Oh, signorina !" and started and woke himself up again ; he blushed at the thought of what Clelia must have said about him. But after all . . . when she married him he could explain how shy he had been . . . and it was no good making himself miserable about it now . . . now he must think of making himself happy. . . .

At last after drowsing off and waking up again several times, he went to sleep ; but it was a troubled sleep all interwoven with strange dreams that half-annoyed and half-pleased him. Sometimes he imagined that poor dear Agnes was not really dead at all but that she was still running the house, still round and short and fat, rather swollen-looking and irritable ; and he seemed to be pleased about it all and then suddenly rather worried and perplexed for some unknown reason. He did not know really what it *was* all about. As he tossed about in bed the end of his moustache got into his nose and started tickling him violently. Instinctively he put his head under the blankets to stifle the sneeze, just like when Agnes used to sleep with him and he was terrified lest he should wake her up and she should be cross with him. Then he noticed that he had drawn himself up along one side of the bed, like when he had to do that so as not to disturb his wife, and he used to stiffen himself uncomfortably, and prevent himself going to sleep,

rather than turn over and run the risk of disturbing her. He smiled—"What a fool I am !"

And he stretched himself out yawning as far as he could go in all directions so that he was lying right across the big bed and taking up almost all the room there was. He rolled over happily, glorying in the joy of being alone, alone, alone !

Now what *had* he been dreaming about ? Whatever it was, he felt as if a great weight had been lifted off his chest when he woke up ; the heavy uncomfortable feeling had gone but he still felt a kind of little gnawing inside him. What could that little gnawing mean ?

He straightened himself out, bringing his limbs close together again ; he was thinking that when Clelia would be lying beside him

Then he put his hand to his forehead and began thinking hard. "After all, one isn't a boy when one's forty-five . . . one must think before doing anything so absurd !" But he could not think, he was submerged by waves of feelings and memories and fears and regrets that swept through his mind like a storm.

It would mean giving up his freedom—his freedom, which meant he could get up at eleven if he liked, and go to bed at midnight or not go to bed at all, just whatever he wanted. He could go out or stay in exactly as he liked, at whatever time he liked ; if he felt like it, he could run about in the house with no clothes on, scream or be silent, not see anyone at all, or have all his friends there, from Tari to poor old Ottavio Berta. He could have his meals when he liked, where he liked and with whom he liked ; he could go in all the funny little places in Rome, to an hotel or a café, at his club, at the House, wherever happened to appeal to him—anywhere, anywhere in the whole wide world ! It was a wonderful feeling ; and then no one grumbled at him, no one scolded him or reproved him . . .

Was he going to give up all this ? Why ? If he'd been in love it would be different ! But his love was really nothing but a reaction against too much perfection.

Yes . . . she was a good girl, Clelia was ; and she hadn't

tried to catch him or anything ; well, neither had her mother for that matter. No, seriously . . . he knew exactly what marriage was. It implied the annihilation of the man's personality, in favour of his wife—or rather, in favour of three wives, his proper wife and his mother-in-law and his sister-in-law !

Good Lord !

Claudio saw his old life beginning all over again—renunciation, resignation, humiliation, one damned thing after another. He thought of his days all regulated and precise, like a school time-table. There were invasions from his mother-in-law, sister-in-law's excuses ; his wife bossed him ; the servants had to be talked to, the money counted out, and rules, rules, rules. . . . There were rules about opening letters, rules about the quantity and quality of his food, rules about friends and books and holidays and clothes, rules about his ties and rules about the dressmaker ; there was a damnable rule about getting up at eight o'clock in the morning and another about leaving the theatre after the second act. There was one rule that said one didn't have clean linen more than once a week, and another about not going for walks and not travelling, and yet another about doing his mother-in-law's shopping or finding a nice husband for his sister-in-law, and another rule made him stay all huddled up in one corner of the bed, quite still, without breathing or sneezing or anything ! . . .

"I should be mad. . . ."

The morning light filtered through the shutters. Four little feet pattered along the corridor ; then there was a whine and a long scratching noise.

"Him too !" Claudio sat up and put one foot out of bed. "What ? I should have to have Bibi back again, and take him for a walk twice a day on the lead . . . and see he didn't behave badly and wait. . . ."

"He'd far rather go back to Cavour."

He leaned on the edge of the bed, put up one foot and held a sock in his hand.

"Well . . . I really can say that poor dear Agnes has always helped me—in life and in death !"

He wrote a little note to his friend Bellati, and gave orders to the hotel-keeper to send on his letters to Cavour and his luggage to Rome. He left in a carriage.

But at the Three Bridges that spanned the meeting of the Ansiei and the Piave, he suddenly saw Professor Fanolli, a gun on his shoulder, coming along with three hounds in front of him. Without knowing why Claudio felt suddenly drawn towards him ; he stopped the carriage, leapt out and shook hands warmly with his friend. Then he said gratefully :

"I want to say good-bye to you. . . . If you ever want a promotion or a new post or anything . . . anything . . . I would do anything . . . really . . . I should enjoy doing anything I could for you."

"But why are you dashing off like this so suddenly ? Where are you off to ?"

Claudio Volterri answered with a sigh ; his words were marked by a truly statesman-like reserve :

"I am going to Cavour——"

(From "I. Sentieri della Vita." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)



ANTONIO LINATI

(1878-)



THE MAN WHO CAME FROM PURGATORY

(Translated by Miss NANCY LAURIER)

I HAD by now grown stubbornly determined to find out whence came that strange sound of a mandoline, which I had heard as I passed down this lonely little alleyway in Florence, so I turned round and there, in a corner, I espied a little old music-shop. I drew near.

It had two windows giving on the doorway. In one were displayed shining horns and cornets, in the other, guitars and ocarinas behind which were hung the latest fox-trots and Piedigrotta's love-songs. The shop seemed half-dark inside, but beyond at the back, one could see a room lit by a lamp hung from the ceiling, shedding a flickering gleam of light on to a little table loaded with musical instruments. And beside it, wrapped in shadow, sat a fat man who with rhythmical gestures was drawing from a corded instrument the curious cadences which had so attracted me.

I pushed open the door and went in. And as the man was not aware of my presence, I crossed the shop, went into the back room, and sat down in front of him.

He was all alone in this little room with walls covered with diagrams and with violin "pieces," which clearly showed it to be the atelier of a hard-working lute-maker.

As for the man himself, he was rather corpulent and wore an alpaca coat ; his face was plump but firm and crafty.

As he had finished his *ricercata*, he looked me straight in the face with a pair of singularly clear, cold eyes, like those of an image.

"You wanted . . .?"

"If I took the liberty of coming in," I said, "it was only because I was drawn by the unusual sound of the instrument you are holding."

"It's a lute," said he, moving into the light with a certain pride, "an old piece of my own making."

"A lute ! But whatever made you think of starting to make those old play-things again ?"

His eyes flashed.

"But you don't know who I am !" he exclaimed, standing up in a threatening manner.

"I have not that pleasure," said I, also rising to my feet.

"I am the famous Belacqua, whom Dante has placed in Purgatory."

* * *

Whether Pirandello's drama and Wells' novels have now accustomed us to treat with ghosts, or whether, since the war, we have the faculty of ever wondering at anything, I cannot say ; but this unexpected revelation did not arouse in me any undue astonishment ; indeed, I might almost say that it appeared quite natural.

"Why then, you must be the famous sluggard who sits on the slopes of the Sacred Mountain, in the shadow of the 'great boulder,' like him who seems more idle than all his fellows—so that Laziness seemed his very sister ?"

"The same," replied the man, and sat down again, conciliated.

"And so you wished to come back among us, and in this your sweet and ancient city of Florence."

"And as you see, I have re-opened my old shop."

"Oh, now I remember perfectly. You were, in your time, an excellent lute-maker. *Unde cum magna cura sculpebat et incidebat colla et capita cithararum et aliquando etiam pulsabat.*"

"That," he rejoined with a grin, "is Benvenuti's commentary on the lines in which Dante makes mention of me."

"O extraordinary man !" I exclaimed, "You have read the Poem then. What a phenomenal thing that a man whom Dante has damned should be able to come back to life and read about himself and be his own judge in Dante's writings!"

"Read about himself, judge himself and . . . protest," he snarled gloomily. "I still fail to understand how he dared to slander me so."

"To be sure, a Lute-maker of your worth !"

"Let be for my trade," he rejoined, putting down his lute and looking me in the face with his shining crystal-like eyes. "It's a question of morals ! A nice sort of figure he has made me cut in the eyes of six centuries of posterity ! Revengeful nature !" he hissed. "A man of factions . . . ! Libelling me for idleness, I who, as an artist or a composer, was the leader of every genial activity ! Listen, listen . . ." he went on as if seized by an irresistible desire to his wrath of multi-secular standing. "That man, bigotted and exiled as he was, began to hate all us Florentines like poison—sheer party prejudice of course, and vindictive anger ! Oh the number of respectable people that he has put down in Hell, simply because they were born between St. Peter's Gate and the great Dome !"

"But come," I said, "he has at least placed you all right. Just think of Farinata."

"But I ought to be in Paradise !" cried Belacqua, standing up in all his corpulence. "A man like me ought to stand by the side of Cacciaguida ! Besides," he went on in calmer tones, "how should he have understood me ? He the enraged Partisan, how could he understand me, the fine, diverting musician, a composer of airs, a man of inward meditation ? Oh, I remember him well when he used to pass in front of my little shop with his friend Casella, and they would stop and speak to me. And nearly always, you see, it was to chaff me or to reproach me about my laziness which he, with his nonsense, had made a byword in Florence. Lazy, because he always saw me with these trifles, carving screws and handles and cases, or sitting in the doorway with my lute in my hands, composing and studying new airs and cadences. He couldn't

understand the nobility and beauty of this delicate, dreamy trade of mine, he who had nothing but politics and factions in his head."

Belacqua at this moment seemed beside himself; the words broke out from under his moustache in a surge of low whistling sounds, in which I seemed to hear quiver the wrath of the ancient Guelf against a background of a city tossed by the raging storms of factions.

"And then, see here," he went on, drawing up his knee with the very movement which Dante has described, "even though I had been the idle fellow that he has depicted in me, is not laziness perhaps a noble and perfect, a sacred and an enviable thing? What infinite advantages man would reap from it, if only as an antidote to these times of wild egoism and frenzied commerce!"

"I don't deny it, but . . ."

"Laziness!" he broke in, "but everyone ought to welcome her with open arms, dear, sweet-faced child that she is! Laziness adds time to time, does away with the turbid foment and causes affections and meditations, artistic inspiration and the sweetness of the heart to ripen within us. Oh, men are for ever tormenting things and stirring them up against themselves like serpents! Laziness on the contrary, lets everything abide in a state of complete and adorable tranquillity. Men burn away their minutes in their frenzy to do and enjoy; Laziness savours them one by one, and distils from them delicious nectars of sweetness and love. . . . But there, I ask you, was Dante the kind of man who could ever understand such things? And so, he has put me down into Purgatory."

I was on the point of retorting that if ever there was a man to understand these things, it was he who had written the "Vita Nuova"; but Belacqua got up and took down another lute from the wall.

"And, I ask you, was he either a man to understand the delicacy of such a chord as this?" And holding the lute to himself, he lightly drew his fingers over the strings.

A very sweet, far-off sound like the many-voiced murmur of melodious bees, was heard in the room. Belacqua remained for a moment with hand and face upraised to listen to it and to savour the very last vibrations, while an expression of infinite enjoyment radiated over his face. Then he put down the instrument and pulled at his moustaches.

"Oh, beautiful, beautiful," I cried, "Long live laziness, Belacqua mine!"

Then I rose and made a movement to go.

"And how, if I may ask, does life treat you nowadays?"

"Well, times are not as bad for us souls who have been damned by Dante as you might think, believe me. People are eager for ghosts to-day. And as for my trade, one has to change. . . . And there is no lack of instruments for Jazz Bands."

"Jazz Bands!"

"Come and see, if you like."

He rose and led the way along a short passage. At the end, a small door opened in front of me and I saw a large room, dazzlingly lit, around which some twenty workmen seated on benches were working at pieces of brass which flashed as they reflected the great selenium bulbs above.

"This is the French horn department," said Belacqua holding the door open in front of me, "and beyond are the percussions and trombones."

I looked aghast. Belacqua a maker of band instruments?

An anxious question hovered on my lips. Belacqua forestalled me and led me into the back of the shop.

"I know," he said, motioning me to sit down and pouring me out a little glass of liqueur, "you find it rather odd that the clever lute-maker, the negligent Belacqua . . . But haven't I told you that Dante himself did not understand the real nature of my genius? Ah, if he could but see me now!"

"Now do tell me, Belacqua; how do you manage to reconcile all your great love of laziness with this frenzy of industry?"

"Ah, I was waiting for that. But don't you realise? You, a wise and cultured man, can't you understand that all the

work in there (and he pointed to the workshop) is done by me solely in order to maintain my laziness in there (and he pointed to the lute-worker's atelier). Don't you know that today the times are so strange and contradictory that no one is allowed to enjoy the benefits and pleasures of idleness except . . . by working? That one cannot be lazy for one hour without being active for twenty-three? I have adapted myself to the times, that is all. I make trombones and big cases so that I may be able to make myself raebecks and viols da gamba as I did once. I live in a state of bustle and annoyance for ten hours a day, to be able to grant myself one idyllic hour with my gracious lutes in the evening. Oh how I defend her for myself, my dear old Laziness. Provided this ancient and delightful sister lives with me at least for one hour, what does the rest matter?"

"Oh, wise man," said I getting up, "you are right. Among all the suggestions which men put forward every day to save this sad, bad old world of ours, I verily believe that yours is the best. Once more, long live laziness, friend Belacqua."

And so I left him, for I did not wish to trespass further on the periodical snatches of laziness of that Heroic Idler.

(From "Storie di Bestie e di Fantasmi." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)



GIOVANNI PAPINI

(1881-)



(I)

THE BEGGAR OF SOULS

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

Q U I T E early in the evening I had spent my last pennies on a cup of coffee ; but I was so used to the drink that it did not stimulate or inspire me as I had hoped. At that time I was almost hungry—hungry for bread and hungry for fame. I had no one in the world to care for me. The editor of a magazine—a big pale, silent man—used to accept my short stories when he had nothing better to publish ; he invariably gave me five lire whatever the length or value of what I wrote.

On that January evening the air was full of the sound of wind and bells—a fitful, gusty wind ; the terrible monotony of bells. I had gone into the big cafe (glaring light, sleepy faces) and emptied my cup very slowly, trying all the time to conjure up some strange adventure in my mind ; I goaded on my imagination, in the hope of hitting on some kind of story that would help me earn my living for a day or two. I had to write a story that very evening so that next morning I could go and see my usual publisher ; he would advance me enough money for a really good meal. That was why I followed the train of my thoughts with such effort ; I was ready to spring on the first idea and the first glimpse of inspiration that would do to fill up the carefully numbered sheets of paper I had in front of me.

I spent four hours and a quarter like this, in useless, restless

waiting. My mind was empty ; my imagination was heavy, and my brain was tired. I gave up the idea of writing anything, threw down my last pennies on the table and went out. The moment I got outside a sentence suddenly leapt into my mind—a sentence I had heard dozens of times ; but I could not remember who had said it : “If any man, however ordinary, could write down the whole of his life, he would write one of the greatest novels that have ever been written.” For about ten minutes I thought of nothing but this sentence ; it stuck in my head but I did not seem to be able to draw any fresh conclusions from it. But when I had got quite close to my house I suddenly stopped and said to myself : “But why shouldn’t you do that ? Why shouldn’t you write the life of some man—some real person—the first ordinary person you come across ? I’m not an ordinary person ; and then I’ve written all about myself so many times already in my stories that I haven’t anything else left to say. Now I must find someone at once—any man, someone I don’t know, quite an ordinary man ; and I must make him tell me everything he’s ever done. This very evening I must get hold of a human life. . . . I shan’t beg money from anyone ; but I shall beg and insist on being given a biography.”

This plan seemed so strange and yet so simple that I decided to carry it out at once. I turned away from my house again, towards the middle of the town, where, even at that late hour, there was some hope of finding people. So I wandered, a new strange beggar, looking for someone to exploit. I walked quickly, looking firmly in front of me, staring at everyone who went by, and carefully trying to choose a satisfactory person. Then, like a night robber or a highwayman, I loitered at a cross-road, waiting for some man to go by, an ordinary man whom I could ask for the story of his life.

The first person to go by under the lamp was alone, and seemed to be middle-aged ; but I did not want to stop him because his strangely lined face looked too interesting and I had decided to make my experiment under the least favourable circumstances possible. Then a young man went by

wrapped in a long cloak ; but his wind-blown hair, his drugfiend eyes discouraged me : I saw he was a dreamer, an eccentric creature, no ordinary man in the street. The third person who went by was old and quite clean-shaven ; he was humming a sad little Spanish folk-song, which must have reminded him of his golden, revelling, Southern youth, a life full of warmth and love. He wouldn't do for me either, so I did not stop him.

When I think of it I cannot remember the kind of exasperation I felt just then. Just imagine a strange kind of beggar-highwayman, eager and excited, waiting for someone he doesn't know, longing to hear a life-story he knows nothing about, and burning with the desire to spring upon an unknown prey. And then a spiteful and capricious destiny willed that the men who went by were not at all the ones I wanted ; those I met were all out of the ordinary, they all bore on their countenance the stamp of an interesting life. I would have given anything in the world just then to have come across one of the innumerable Philistines I knew, with their pink placid faces exactly like little pigs, that had disgusted or amused me so many times already.

But in those days I was stubborn and brave ; so I waited and waited under the street lamp that flickered and revived as the wind blew. By now the streets were deserted, and the wind had discouraged those who walk by night. Now and then a swift shadow awoke the silence of the streets. At last one of these shadows passed under the light where I was waiting : I knew at once that he was the man I was looking for. He was of rather indefinite age, neither old nor young, neither handsome nor ugly, with calm eyes and well-kept moustache : and he wore a thick cloak in excellent condition.

As soon as he had got a few steps past me, I caught him up and stopped him. He started with fright, and held up his hand as if to defend himself ; but I reassured him at once : "Don't be frightened," I said, with the gentlest voice I could manage. "I'm not a murderer—no, I'm not a thief or a beggar either. Well, yes, I really am a beggar ; but I don't

want your money. I only want one thing, and that won't cost you anything to give—I want the story of your life.”

The man opened his eyes very wide and made a step backwards. I realised that he thought I was mad ; so I went on to say, extremely calmly : “I'm not what you think I am ; I'm not a madman. I'm only something rather like that—I'm an author. I've got to write a story before to-morrow, to save myself from starvation, so I want you to tell me all about yourself, who you are and what you do and so on, so that I can write my story about you. Frankly, I really need you—and your life story . . . your confession. Please don't deny me this one favour. I'm sure you couldn't refuse to help a miserable creature like me. You are just the person I was looking for, and with the subject-matter you can give me perhaps I shall write a masterpiece. . . .”

The man seemed impressed by what I said : he looked at me with pity now, instead of with fear.

“Well—if you really need to hear my life story as much as all that,” he said, “I can easily tell it you, especially as it's quite simple and straightforward. I was born thirty-five years ago. My parents were fairly well-off, honest and respectable. My father was in business and my mother had small private means. I was the only son. I went to school when I was six. When I was eleven I got through my “*licenza elementare*” without having worked particularly hard, though I didn't slack either. Then when I was still eleven I went to the *ginnasio* and, at sixteen, to the *Liceo* ; when I was nineteen I went to the university, and I got my degree at twenty-four ; I didn't give any signs of special intelligence or of hopeless stupidity. After I'd taken my degree my father got me a job in a railway office and produced a fiancée for me. I work eight hours a day, and the work doesn't really need anything but patience and a fairly good memory. Then every six years my salary is increased automatically by 200 lire. I know that when I'm sixty-four I shall draw a pension of 3,453 lire and 62 centesimi. I liked my fiancée very much, so after we'd been engaged a year we got married ; but we've never gone in for

useless sentimentality at all—I used to go and see her three times a week regularly and twice a year—on her birthday and on Christmas Day—took her a present and gave her a kiss. I have had two children by her—a boy and a girl. The boy is ten now, and is going to be an engineer. The girl is nine, and she's going to be a schoolmistress. I live very quietly, with no worries and no ambitions. I get up at eight every morning, and at nine o'clock every evening I go to the café and there I talk about the weather, the war and the Government with three or four of my business colleagues. Now I've told you what you want, will you excuse me, because it's already ten minutes after the time I'm supposed to be back at home?"

When he had said all this very calmly, he moved away. For a moment I felt shaken and terrified. When I thought of that life, so appallingly monotonous, so ordinary, regular, steady and commonplace, I was overwhelmed by bitter grief: I was so terrified at the thought that I almost burst into tears and ran away. But I still lingered. "Well," I said to myself, "here's this celebrated 'average man'—in whose name solemn doctors fly at each other's throats and swear at each other like so many lunatics. This is the model man, the normal man, the real hero of modern life, the little wheel in the great machine, the little stone in the great wall, a man who doesn't bother about unhealthy dreams and wild imaginings. I thought such a man couldn't possibly exist, and now I've got him here just beside me, terrifying because he's so completely unconscious of his colourless happiness." But he did not wait for me to finish my reflections and started going away. Still wondering, but resolved to find out all I could, I followed him and asked: "But is there *really* nothing else in your life? Hasn't anything ever happened to you? Hasn't anyone ever tried to kill you? Has your wife never deceived you? Haven't your superiors ever crushed you or . . . ?"

"No, none of those things has ever happened to me," he answered; he was polite but obviously a little annoyed. "Nothing of what you've suggested. My life has always been calm and even and regular; I've never had great joys or great

sorrows, and nothing in particular has ever happened to me."

"Really nothing?" I interrupted him. "Really? Try and remember: try and think—I can't believe nothing's ever happened to you at all, ever—your life would be too ghastly."

"But I assure you I've never had anything happen to me," the Average Man answered, making a great effort to be polite. "At least not till to-night. Meeting you, sir, has been really my first adventure. If you really need something to write about, write about that."

And without giving me the time to answer he went off, and touched his hat. I stood there for a minute or two, as if hypnotised; but I did not write my story. Since that evening, I've never been able to laugh at ordinary people again.

(From "Il tragico Quotidiano." Firenze, Vallecchi, Publishers.)

(II)

THE MAN WHO BELONGED TO ME

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

I

I CAN'T say exactly how long Amico Dite's body and soul had been following mine, because I left off keeping a diary years ago. I am rather absent-minded, so probably I did not notice what day my second shadow (a solid and more or less living shadow) happened to make its entrance on the dim stage of my life.

One morning, as I was leaving home, I noticed I was being followed by a man of about forty, who wore a long blue overcoat; he seemed gay and lively (but not too much so) and followed me at a respectful distance so that I could not very well turn round and ask him what he was doing. I had nothing in particular to do, and I had only come out to get away from the sound of a wood fire crackling in the grate; so I amused myself watching this man although there was

nothing remarkable about his appearance. I was sure he wasn't a detective, because I'm so lacking in physical courage, and I so much dislike being talked about that I have always kept out of active politics, and laziness and clumsiness in any sort of manual work have saved me from earning my living through crime. I didn't think this man in blue could be a thief after my purse. Everyone in the neighbourhood knew I was rather poor ; and you could tell I wasn't rich by looking at my clothes, which were untidy, not studiedly careless.

Although there was no reason why I should have been followed, I began going round and round the complicated streets in the middle of the town, to make sure I hadn't made a mistake about it. The man still followed me, looking more and more pleased as he went on. I turned off into one of the principal streets, and began to walk more quickly ; but there was still the same distance between me and the man in blue. I went into a post office to buy a three-halfpenny stamp ; the unknown man came into the same shop and also bought a three-halfpenny stamp. Then I got into a tram ; my smiling follower got in too, and when I got out, he got out just behind me. I bought a paper and he bought exactly the same paper. I sat down on a bench, and he sat down on another bench quite close to me ; I took out a cigarette, and he took one out too and waited to light his until I had lit mine.

All this amused me and irritated me at the same time. "He may be a humourist with nothing to do," I thought, "so he wants to amuse himself at my expense." At last I made up my mind to solve the problem in the quickest way possible, so I went and stood in front of the man as if I were going to ask him who he was and what he wanted. But there was no need for me to ask him. The man in blue got up, took off his hat, smiled and said very quickly : "Excuse me—I'll explain everything—but first let me introduce myself : I am Amico Dite. I haven't any definite occupation but that doesn't really matter. I've got lots of things to tell you but . . . well, up till now. . . . I wanted to write to you—I actually *did* write to you two or three times but I don't always send the letters

I write. Otherwise I'm quite an ordinary kind of person, although you might sometimes think. . . ."

Here Amico Dite stopped and hesitated a little ; then he went on quickly, as if he had suddenly remembered something extremely important :

"Wouldn't you like to drink something ? A drop of Marsala perhaps—or some coffee ?"

We both went off together quickly as if we both had the same instinct to get the matter cleared up then and there. As soon as we saw a café we both dashed in, like people who want a drink at once in a great hurry. However, we sat down in a corner by the fire, without ordering anything. The café was little, and all full of smoke and cabbies and the waiter looked a fearful scoundrel ; but we hadn't time to choose anywhere else.

"I should like to know . . ." I began.

"I'll tell you all about everything," said the man. "I don't want to keep anything from you. I'm in rather a difficult and unfortunate situation—but I'll tell you at once, I have the greatest trust in you. Here I am, then ; I put myself in your hands. I'm yours to do what you like with. . . ."

"But I don't see. . . ."

"I assure you, you'll see everything in a moment. Let me explain. Didn't I tell you who I was. I know, my name doesn't tell you anything about me. Well, I'll tell you what sort of person I am—I'm an ordinary man—appallingly ordinary ; but I want to live in an extraordinary way, to have a really thrilling and amazing life."

"Forgive me. . . ."

"Yes, yes. I'll forgive everything. Only as I told you, I simply must say what I have to say. . . . I trust you implicitly. You shall be my saviour, my spiritual adviser, and master of my body and my soul. I'm too cautious, too respectable ; I'm too much of a gentleman—too much just like myself. You've written so many fantastic stories, so many extraordinary novels—and I've lived so much among all your characters that I dream about them in the night and think

about them in the daytime. I sometimes think I see them in the street and then, I get absolutely wild and despairing, I want to suppress them and forget them for ever and ever. . . .”

“Thank you . . . but. . . .”

“Wait one moment, please. I’ll explain now why I thought about you and why I followed you. A few days ago I said to myself : ‘You are a fool, the kind of person you can meet anywhere any day ; and you’ve got this craze of wanting to live a glorious life, all risks and adventures, like the people in six-penny stories and cheap novels. But you’ve no imagination so you can’t expect to have that sort of life. The only thing to do is to look round till you find an author who makes up extraordinary characters, and make him a present of your life so that he can do whatever he likes with it and turn it into something really exciting and beautiful and unexpected. . . .”

“So you’d like me to . . . ?”

“Just a moment, please. In a few minutes I shall do exactly what you want and then you can stop my talking when you like, only now I would like to finish what I’ve got to say. I still belong to myself for the moment ! I’ve only one thing to tell you and that is—I’ve chosen you to be my director and so I make you a present of my life and whatever money you want to help you make it interesting. You have plenty of imagination and you’ll easily be able to break the ghastly monotony of my life. Up till now you have only been able to control imaginary people ; but to-day you’ve got a real man, a man who moves and who suffers and you can do whatever you like with him. I put myself in your hands—not like a corpse though. You wouldn’t know what to do with me if I did—but like a mechanical toy, an amazing marionette that can talk and laugh and do whatever you order it to. From now on, I give you my life and a thousand pounds a year, to pay for all the things you’ll need to make my life picturesque and adventurous. I’ve got the proper document here in my pocket . . . waiter, a pen and ink ! There’s only the date and your signature missing. Say yes or no, just as you feel, but say it quickly !”

I pretended to think it over for a few seconds, but I had really made up my mind already. Amico Dite was fulfilling one of my oldest desires. I had always been a little grieved that I could only make up the lives of imaginary people. In my spare moments I often thought of what I would do if I had a real flesh-and-blood creature to do what I liked with. Now the very man was offering himself up to me, with a good income thrown in as well.

"I never waste time in bargaining," I said after my pretended consideration, "so I'll accept your offer although you must realise what a great responsibility it is for me, taking charge of a soul and a body as well. Let's see the conditions. . . ."

Amico Dite handed me an official-looking document in a thick gray paper cover and I read it in a few moments. Everything was in order. By signing this paper I became the rightful owner of the wealth and life of Amico Dite, the only condition being that I should constantly be directing him so that he should lead an illustrious and adventurous life. The contract lasted a year, but it could be renewed if Amico Dite was satisfied with the way I managed him.

I signed without hesitation and left Amico Dite immediately; after having promised to write to him next day and ordering him not to follow me but to have some strong drink. And as I was going out I saw him ordering, with his usual charming smile, one of the most celebrated bitters in the world.

II

That evening I did not go to bed as terribly bored as I usually did. I had something new and important to think about, that was quite worth spending a sleepless night for. A man had become my property, and really belonged to me. I could lead him, drive him, send him anywhere I wanted ; I could experiment with him and give him strange emotions and unheard of adventures.

Now what could I make him do next day ? Ought I to order

him to do some fixed thing, or should I leave him in the dark and then spring something on him suddenly? Finally I chose something that combined the two methods. Next day I wrote and told him that until he heard to the contrary, he was to sleep all day and spend the night out of doors wandering about in all sorts of lonely places. Next day I went to an estate agent's and took a lonely little house outside the town for six months. Then I hired two of the unemployed who were looking for work for the winter. In four days everything was ready. On the appointed evening I had Amico Dite followed, and when he had got out into a lonely place, my accomplices attacked him and took him, gagged and bound, to the house I had ready. Unfortunately no one noticed what we were doing, and no one reported the mysterious disappearance of Amico Dite; so I had to provide for two strong men, who wanted paying as well as feeding, for several months.

The worst of it was that I had not the slightest idea what to do with this man who belonged to me. On the evening of his gift, I had thought that kidnapping him would be an excellent beginning for an exciting life but I had not bothered to think about what could happen afterwards. Yet even Amico Dite's life wanted its next instalment at once, like a newspaper serial.

As I could think of nothing better I resorted to the old trick of sending to live with him, in the little house where I had installed him, a woman who was always masked and never spoke to him. It was very difficult finding a woman who would agree to do this; and even more difficult to train her, and even then she wouldn't engage herself for more than a month. Luckily Amico Dite was something of a misogynist and was over forty, so none of the things you might have expected actually did happen. After a fortnight I realised that I should have to change my tactics; so I had my two unemployed set my man free, and I sent him back to his home.

I began to realise that Amico Dite hadn't behaved in the least like the ordinary man he said he was when he made me

take charge of him like this. Who else but a really queer person would have imagined such a subtle kind of slavery ?

A man I knew who was an excellent swordsman agreed to help me at this juncture. One day, when Amico Dite was sitting quietly drinking a glass of milk in a very smart café, this man came up and glared at him ; then he jostled him and as soon as Dite said something, he slapped him two or three times quite calmly as if he did not want to hurt him too much. Amico Dite asked my permission to send his seconds to challenge the man who had insulted him ; I produced two of my friends who obliged him to fight although he did not want to in the least. Amico Dite knew nothing whatever about duelling and it was just because of this that he struck out violently at the very beginning and wounded his adversary seriously. I took this opportunity of explaining to him that he must leave the town at once, but he would not hear of going away without me ; he preferred being tried before the Court, and so he got himself sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

I really thought I should be free from him for that time, but after a day or two I began thinking it was my duty to set Amico Dite free. It seemed almost impossible ; but, by means of bribes, I managed to convince two people that what I was doing was an excellent thing ; and so, perfectly disguised, Amico Dite succeeded in getting out of the prison one day just before dawn. This time he really had to go into exile, so I had to leave my house, my work and my country all in order to arrange his escape.

When we reached London I was in a greater muddle than ever. I couldn't speak a word of English, and in the midst of that huge unknown city I was less than ever in a position to find any exciting adventures for my man's benefits. Finally I had to ask the advice of a private detective who gave me some vague instructions in abominable French. After consulting a good map of London, I took Amico Dite into the most disreputable parts, but, to my great annoyance, nothing whatever happened to him there. We came across the usual drunken sailors, the usual painted brazen-faced women, and

numbers of noisy thrifty "viveurs," but no one paid any attention to us ; perhaps they thought we were something to do with the police, we looked so sure of ourselves wandering round the mazes of little streets that are all exactly alike.

Then I had the idea of sending Amico Dite all by himself into the North of England, and giving him only twenty or thirty shillings beyond his railway fare. As he knew no English either I hoped something very disagreeable might happen to him or, better still, that he might never come back at all. I was really getting tired of this man who belonged to me, and for whom I worked so hard and gave up so much ; I was simply longing for the day when I could get back to my own dear old town full of cafés and loiterers. But after a fortnight had gone by Amico Dite came back to London in perfect health and spirits. He had come across an Italian friend of his in Edinburgh—a 'cellist who had gone to Scotland years ago, and who had asked him to stay and amused him during the time he was there.

But I wouldn't give up yet. In some newspaper I had seen the address of a little club for psychical research, that was looking for new members ; it promised them they would see real spirits, ghosts who could talk and so on. I ordered Amico Dite to apply for membership immediately and to go there regularly every evening. He kept on going for a week and saw nothing at all ; then one morning he came to me and told me that he had actually met a ghost, but that it wasn't much better than ordinary men. Indeed it seemed to have been rather more foolish than most people because it stole his handkerchief, took away his chair from under him, pulled his hair and hit him in the back.

"Well, really," he said, "I don't think there's been anything really extraordinary in what you've made me do. Excuse me if I speak to you openly—but I think you must agree with me that in your novels you've got much more originality and more amusing imagination than in real life. Just think—kidnapping, then a masked woman and a duel, then escape and now ghosts ! You don't seem to have been able to think of

anything better than these old-fashioned tricks—the sort of thing you get in French novels. There are much more thrilling things in Hofmann and Poe, and much more ingenious ideas in Gaboriau and Ponson du Terrail. I really can't understand this sudden collapse of your imagination. At the very beginning I used to do everything you did, really expecting to have an exciting life,; but I soon came to the conclusion that your life was just like anyone else's, and I supposed you must keep all your invention for your novels : but now I'm beginning to doubt this as well, and much as I dislike doing it I am obliged to tell you that unless you find something better to make me do I shall have to look for another master, even before our contract has run out."

Pride prevented my answering this extraordinary ingratitude. I thought to myself how for months—ever since I had taken over control of that man—I had not been master of my own life ; I had been obliged to leave all my work in the middle, to leave my country, to worry myself inventing romantic adventures and reliable people to carry them out. Since I had taken possession of Amico Dite's life, I had had to sacrifice the whole of my own life to him. I, nominally his master, had really degenerated into his slave ; or at best, merely the manager of his personal existence. As he said, he must find something "more impressive" than what I had done for him, and moreover, something that had no need of accomplices. After having thought the matter over quietly for a day or two, I wrote to him as follows :

"MY DEAR DITE,—Since you belong to me according to a formal contract, I can arrange for your life or your death as I see fit. I therefore order you to shut yourself up in your room on Saturday night at eight o'clock ; then lie down on your bed and take one of the pills here enclosed. At half past eight take another one and at *nine exactly* take the third. Should you disobey my orders I give up any responsibility I may ever have had for your life, from this day onwards."

I knew that Amico Dite would not flinch at the fear of death. In spite of being so particular, he was a gentleman and had a

great respect for his word and signature. I bought a strong emetic and arranged to be at his house just before nine—that is, just before he took the last pill, which would inevitably kill him if he took it.

On Saturday evening I ordered a cab for eight o'clock, because I lived in a boarding house a long way from where Amico Dite was staying. The cab did not turn up until a quarter past eight, so I impressed on the driver the fact that I was in a great hurry. The horse started off, indeed, with a sort of pseudo-gallop, but after about ten minutes he stumbled and fell down in the street. It seemed hopeless to try to pick him up so I quickly paid the cabby and looked round for another cab. Luckily I found one at once and I calculated that at nine o'clock exactly I ought to be at Amico Dite's house. I began to worry a little nevertheless because there was a thick fog and even if we were only five minutes late, it meant that the poor man would certainly be dead.

Then suddenly the cab pulled up. We were at the end of an important street full of cars and 'buses, and a policeman held up his hand to stop our going by. I leapt out of the cab like a madman and rushed up to the huge policeman, trying to make him understand that I was in a great hurry and that a man's life was at stake.

But he either did not understand or would not understand. I had to go the rest of the way on foot, but partly because of the fog and partly because I did not know London very well, I took a wrong turning and I only noticed I was going in the wrong direction when I'd been rushing along for about ten minutes. So, still running, I turned back and went in the other direction. It was only a few minutes before nine, and I was making prodigious efforts so as to get there in time. But I only reached the boarding house at seven minutes past nine, and rang the bell frantically. The moment someone opened it, I rushed into Amico Dite's room. He was lying in his shirt-sleeves on the bed, pale and stiff as a corpse. I shook him and called him by name ; I felt whether his heart were beating and whether he were breathing still. No : he was indeed a

corpse ; the little box I had sent him was empty. Amico Dite had kept his word to the last. I had intended to give him the terror of certain death and then the shock of resurrection ; but instead I had given him death, real and irrevocable death.

I stayed all night in his room, numb with grief. In the morning I was found with the dead man, as pale and as silent as he. My papers were all confiscated, and my last letter to Dite was found as well. The trial was extremely short because I did not even put up a defence or shew the contract I still had put away somewhere. It is several years now since I have been in prison ; but I am not sorry for what I have done. Amico Dite has made my life much more worth telling than it would have been without him, and I don't think I have managed so badly even though in the year in which he belonged to me I spent a good deal more than the thousand pounds he gave me.

(From "Parole e Sangue." Firenze, Vallecchi, Publishers.)

(III)

THE DIABOLICAL GENIUS

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

I HAD stopped twice at Prague already without ever managing to see him. The first time (I was so young !) I had not even the courage to look for his house ; the second time the concierge somehow made me understand that the great man I was looking for no longer lived there. And I had gone a roundabout way, and taken a room for the night, all on purpose to see him ! In that town, where everyone speaks an amazingly obscure and ugly language (at least to Southern ears) it was quite impossible to discover where he was, or to ask whether he still lived in Prague and how I could find out where he lived. So I took the train back, feeling extremely irritated ; it was not till I got to the sunny town of Verona that I began to smile again.

But I could not do without this man who had had so much

influence over me ever since I was sixteen or seventeen. I felt drawn towards him, as one might feel drawn towards one's destiny ; one can avoid it temporarily but never escape completely. My whole soul was full of him, his words and thoughts and ideas. I found myself dreaming his dreams, singing his music, following out trains of thought suggested by his words, and behaving like some one or other of the people in his books. No author (I use this word because I can't think of a better or stronger one) had ever made so much impression on me ; and this impression, instead of fading as time went by, coloured all my mentality more and more without giving me any hope of escape. He was—at least so it seemed to me—the most original writer that century had produced in Europe. He seemed to combine something of Poe's terror, Nietzsche's loneliness, the poetry of Shelley and Dostoievski's anguish ; the red of Hell and the blue of Heaven, the smile of a child and the swearing of devils . . . but there was something else as well, a something inexpressible in words, unlike anything else ; you could only call it after him. It was his own genius which was absolutely new compared with other people's, but so extraordinary and unusual that hardly anyone noticed it. And although he had been famous for quite a number of years, his fame was the sort that only became real popularity after the author is dead. People talked about him as a proud and solitary creature, an enemy of the human race, and rather odd and perverted. Hardly anyone really knew his works ; people called him "the Man who is Damned."

I liked his novels specially : they all seemed to be autobiographical, rather like Strindberg's. The blood-curdling strangeness of all the people and the things that happened in them made me imagine his life to be a sort of wild race, where a damned soul rushed howling through the sorrows and fears of life. But after so many years of silent admiration I wanted something more than his books ; I wanted to look into the man's eyes, to hear new words from his mouth ; I wanted to read in the lines of his face the anguish of ghastly discoveries he had made about his own and other people's souls.

But I did not give up hope even after that first unfortunate attempt at seeing him. Eighteen months later I happened to go through Prague again, and I was lucky enough to come across a Bohemian engraver I had got to know in Italy ; we managed to get along somehow by talking French together. Although he seemed extremely cold and unfriendly, he was so kind as to accompany me to the house of my beloved author and argued with the concierge on my behalf. I dashed up the stairs ; but when I reached his door (he lived on the fourth floor) my heart was beating wildly because I had hurried too much or perhaps because I was so excited ; my legs seemed to give way under me ; if I had tried to speak then I am sure my voice would have been hoarse and uncertain. I waited on the landing for a moment. In front of the heavy walnut-coloured door, there, on a shiny brass plate, was engraved, in big black letters, the name I had endowed with so much mystery and excitement. At last I plucked up courage and rang the bell. A middle-aged servant, gray-haired and dressed in black, came to open the door. I whispered the author's name and was told to "step this way." The house looked as if it belonged to a reasonably wealthy business man who liked a quiet life. A ghastly umbrella-stand with a looking glass attached shone in front of the doorway.

The maid shewed me into a long carpeted corridor to my right, which was dimly lit by a little electric bulb hidden in a wrought-iron lamp. At the end of this corridor you turned to the left and found another corridor exactly like the first : at the end of this one you could see an open door, that let through a pale weak light into the passage. I went into the room and was left alone. It was a mere little closet rather than a proper room, with its windows closed ; it was lit by an electric light half shaded by a bit of green paper that hung from the middle of the ceiling. On one side of the room was a black book-case with yellow curtains over the glass ; on the other side, a paper-file, the sort of thing you see in every lawyer's office ; and against the far wall there was a black writing desk covered with green baize : there was nothing on

it but a bottle of ink and a penny penholder. On the walls there was an extraordinarily bad and ordinary little view of Naples ; several coloured reproductions of Old Masters and a business calendar.

To tell the truth, I was rather disappointed in the ordinary, tiny, conventional little room. I had expected to penetrate into the cavern of a Demon ; but instead I seemed to be in a lawyer's office. There was absolutely nothing that could possibly betray the existence of the extraordinary person I had come to look for.

"I wonder—is this the right house ? It might be one of his relations with the same name," I thought.

But I had not time to think of any other solutions because the door opened and I saw a short little man of about fifty, who asked me what I wanted in excellent French. I was so taken aback that I couldn't think of anything to say. It was impossible—the man of my dreams, the object of all my enthusiasm, could not possibly be that gentle and polite little man who was watching me quietly with two little harmless gray eyes, and seemed to smile rather foolishly under his moustache ? How could it be ? That man—dressed immaculately in a frock coat, his hand in the pocket of his striped trousers, with coffee-coloured spats over patent-leather shoes—was that man who looked as if he couldn't be anything better than a retired major or a banker really the same person who had made my heart beat and dazzled me by the brilliance of his satanic writings ? Could the amazing thoughts that had kept me awake night after night, the daring inventions that had transported me into a world so different from everyday life, have really matured behind that smooth low forehead, inside that little bald head ? I simply could not believe it ; the more I looked at him, the more amazed I was. I couldn't help asking :

"Are you really the author I mean—the poet who wrote *Severity*—the author of *Myself and God* and *Problems of Midnight* ?

"Yes, I am," he answered ; he was so polite ; he was not in

the least offended. "Sit down and tell me what I can do for you."

I didn't know where I was ; I couldn't think of anything to say. But he helped me out nobly :

"I see," he said with a smile, "You are one of my foreign admirers and you want to interview me. That's quite easy. I can settle that in a minute."

He went up to the file and took a printed paper out of one box and a bundle of portraits out of another.

"Here you'll find some details about my life written in French, and also the complete list of my works, with a summary of their contents. You can choose whichever of these photographs you like best. I think I look best in profile—but do just as you like. What paper will it appear in ? A daily paper or in a magazine ? What paper will you be writing the article for ?"

When he saw I did not answer but went on staring at him with a bewildered expression, the great author went back to the file and took a little book out of another box. This he gave me, saying : "Here I've had all the most important reviews of my books printed ; it will be useful for you, to know just where you are. You see, they're by good critics and all the articles are out of good papers. I haven't bothered about the reviews in little papers. If you'd like an autograph to put with the photo you can have one—here you are." And the tireless genius got up again, opened a fourth box and slipped a sheet of paper, with a neat, clear handwriting rather like an accountant's, between the pages of the little book he had given me.

I could not get over the surprise I felt.

"Isn't that all you want ?" he went on. "Would you like to know exactly how I work ? I'll tell you then. I work four hours a day but I never write more than 25 or 30 pages at a time. I use a lot of odd out-of-the-way books and old dictionaries. I have an enormous amount of material all carefully classified. For example in this box I keep adjectives ; metaphors in that one ; paradoxes in the one next to it ; up there

descriptions of scenery, and just underneath descriptions of strange people ; down here I've got a whole collection of plots for short stories and novels ; over there, all my strange quotations and on the right a whole little library of extraordinary theories and adventures. You can quite well understand, then, my work isn't very difficult, with all this organisation. I write almost without thinking, more or less mechanically. When I want to write something I know exactly where to lay my hand and I can get what I want in a moment ; I cross out the stuff I've already used with red ink. I'm not one of those idiots who wait for inspiration and the breath of genius and so on. I write regularly, at fixed moments—my methods are just those of any ordinary industry. What do you think ?”

I made another effort to make a remark but still I could say nothing. But he did not seem to mind.

“Tell me,” he went on, looking at me fixedly, with his expressionless eyes : “Couldn't something be done about my books in Italy ? Couldn't you translate some of them and find me a publisher ? I should give you 40 per cent. of any profits and copyright in your country ; if you think there's anything in the idea let's make out a contract at once.”

Luckily the telephone rang in the next room, and the great author dashed off without even begging my pardon. In a minute or two he came back.

“Excuse me,” he said. “My barrister was asking me something. I've got a lawsuit on with my publisher at Munich and I very much hope to win it. But to go back to what I was saying before—will you tell me definitely whether you agree to this contract about those Italian translations ?”

I got up, horrified. Were those fat little hands, all covered with ugly rings, and gesticulating wildly, the same hands that had written so many wonderful things ? Or had I been a fool to believe in him at all ?

I murmured some kind of polite remark and moved to the door to flee from this truly damned creature.

“What ?” he shouted, “Aren't you going to stay to tea ? My wife and the children will be back any moment now and then

we'll all have tea together. You really ought to see my children—two fine boys—one is thirteen and the other seven. My wife plays the piano too and paints—she painted this—don't you like it?"

I collapsed into a chair, completely done for. But the indefatigable talker shewed no signs of surprise and merely began opening and shutting the book-case doors very slowly.

"In here," he said, in a low voice, "are all my works. Here are the first editions, then the other editions and the translations at the bottom. A good lot, aren't there? And just look at the bindings! All in pigskin—and that's very expensive, as you know. I spent a good deal on having them bound but . . . well, one must clothe one's own children decently, don't you think so?"

And so saying, he began to laugh so loudly at his own little joke that I began to pity him more than anything else.

"I can't stay," I shouted. "I really can't. I must go—I must go away."

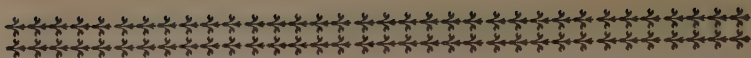
And without waiting to hear any more I opened the door and dashed down the first corridor, then the second and finally came to the front door. Behind me a voice was insisting: "Just one moment, just a minute—tea!"

But I didn't pay any attention. I seized my hat, opened the door and dashed downstairs without even saying good-bye to my idol, who was yelling at me from the landing.

"Go to the devil, you and all other diabolical geniuses!" I said when I was down in the street again.

Feeling very angry and uncomfortable, I got into the train; and as soon as I got back home I threw all the damned creature's works into the fire. I may have done the wrong thing, or I may have made a mistake; but really now I can't think of Prague without feeling overcome with shame and disgust.

(From "Buffonate." Firenze, Vallecchi, Publishers.)



G. A. BORGESE

(1882-)



THE HOUSE

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

THE house stands by the lake, with nine windows, in three rows, which amuse themselves by watching the play of the sun, whose light chases in the airy mornings the shadows of the plane trees along the riverside path, and never catches them. One tall pine tree rises beside it, looking like a parasol upside down which, were it to open, would cover the whole house with its shade. The roof, pointed and overhanging, in the Swiss style, is gay like a rustic chapel.

"Man," said Grei, when he was thinking of buying the place, "is a soul clothed with air and light, and also, we must posit, with flesh and blood. The first step is taken when, with its mother's help at the outset and then with that of food, it has fashioned for itself this sheath of living matter, in which the heart looks out through the eyes and the arms seem to stretch out to embrace the world. It has not gone far if it remains isolated and bewildered, without fulfilling itself in a wife and perpetuating itself in children. Even then the soul is not wholly complete, for it lacks a house, a house of its own ; for a house is the body of the family, just as the sheath of flesh and blood is the body of the individual. The house is built of stone, of mortar, of wood ; yet it is not less alive than the living body of man, with the water and gas pipes, the coils of central heating, the electric light and telephone wires bent along the walls like veins and arteries full of light and sound, with its windows

that look like eyes, with green creepers which seem like young locks obeying the seasons but cheating the years."

These were Grei's thoughts, for in due season he had married a wife, and had had three sons, the ideal number, so at last, having put aside enough money to give him a feeling of security, he had decided to buy the house near the lake.

"Now," he said to his wife, "we have arrived." And she, though she was not accustomed to fall in with his ideas, for this once agreed. The quiet of the place pleased her, she liked to run over the little attic rooms, where there was so much convenience tucked away in a small space. She reckoned that the kitchen garden would yield a whole year's supply of potatoes, and enough green vegetables for the holiday months, four in the summer and nearly one at Easter. The children thought that the pebbles on the beach by the willow trees, grey pebbles with a trace of gold, were precious stones.

If it had not been bad taste Grei would have had certain words, often repeated but none the less true, painted on the façade. For instance. *Parva sed apta mihi* ; or, half in fun, *here we are and here we mean to stay*. Or perhaps he would have had a sundial marked on the wall, with the old motto *tutte feriscono, l'ultima uccide* (every hour wounds and the last one kills). However, he merely reversed the marble plaque on the gate where the commonplace words *Villa Ernestine* were cut, and had it inscribed with a name too poetical for the casual passer-by to understand, but which for the owner of the house had all the simplicity of truth. He renamed his villa *The Haven* ; by this he meant that he had now arrived at the end of his journey, and did but desire the continuance, serene and equable, of such things and feelings as he already possessed.

The front of the house looked on the lake, and the sides on trees and sloping meadows. To the left, perhaps half a kilometre away, there rose a high gleaming wall. It was the wall of the churchyard. Grei liked the cemetery too, it was so neat and so still ; and, even though he was not yet fifty, he decided that here, and nowhere else, would he be buried. He called

on the priest and spoke to him of his intention to acquire a family vault. The price, however, amazed him, and he put the matter off.

"There is plenty of time," he said to his wife, who was ten years his junior. "We can wait till the price goes down."

His eldest son learnt his Latin in preparation for October examinations sitting in the covered porch. The two little ones preferred the road to the garden as their playground.

When the first rains came, Grei stood at the door, his hand in the hand of his wife, listening. Great heat drops fell on leaves that were already stiffening to meet the approach of autumn, and sprang off again on to the ground, falling with the sound of tiny pieces of gold. The *Olea fragrans* gave out its perfume.

"Here, even the rain is a delight" he said to his wife.

"Mario ! Ferdinando !" she shouted out into the street, "Come in this minute," and yawned delicately.

In summer the days were often sultry, but autumn—except for the melancholy of the fine slow-falling rain, and of the grey flood-water which towards the end of October, crept up to the garden wall—was kindly. And when sunny weather came again, the blue sky gleamed as if surprised at itself, so that you might think God had that very day invented its clearness. Fine Sundays brought the sound of motor cars and clouds of dust, but when Monday came round again, and the visitors had departed to Milan, silence fell once more on the gardens and the waters, like the quiet of a sleepless convalescence ; and this lack of all noise might, particularly in the evening, when there was no light but a tiny red lamp hanging at the bend of the road, seem just a little oppressive, like an expectation without hope.

The man, Grei, had to go regularly twice a week to the city to attend to business and increase the family fortunes ; he went with a regularity that he called physiological for it was without impulse and without effort. You can understand how, tired with the fulness of life, desirous of a certain idyllic solitude, as indeed he had been from his youth upwards, he sprang with joy into the last train of the day, packed as it was

with husbands on holiday, and then stood on the deck of the steamer as it crossed the lake, whence he gazed up blissfully at the stars, should there happen to be any. Wife and children met him at the landing stage, and there was delight in the first greetings ; delight which nevertheless wore off in the short walk from the boat to the house. Sometimes when they met by chance, husband and wife or father and children, on the road or in the garden, they had not a word to say to each other. The eldest son, now fifteen years old, was growing difficult. The low narrow rooms seemed to heed conjugal squabbles, long, arid, causeless, at the end of which the husband would say :

“We are not old enough yet for solitude.”

“I like it,” she would answer, “I have no use for a lot of people. But we ought to have a good properly-lighted hall to make rainy weather tolerable.”

The rain was the usual topic of conversation. They even discussed it without words. When the weather was fine, his wife and son seemed taken in by it ; when, in the morning, the great clouds got up, he watched with secret triumph, as if he were personally responsible. And those patches of damp on the ground floor, what a torment, every September, to see them grow bigger and bigger. In three years the joys of living in the country had time to turn topsy-turvy. Now the family looked forward, not to the moment of going thither, but to the moment of going away ; while the trees of the North Station seemed more romantic than the willows, the asphalt of the streets less grey than the lake.

April days on the lake were, might be, lovely beyond words, with the first silvery buds on the trees, and the first songs of the finches. But sometimes you went with these dreams in your soul and found that the neighbouring mountains were still covered with snow. Besides, such a long holiday was not really good for children who went to school.

“Since we don’t mean to go back in spring,” the wife suggested at last, “why not let the house ? Say, from November to June.”

They put an advertisement in the papers, praising the loveliness of the place as if they still believed in it. The advertisement concluded with the usual words "No invalids."

A family, father, mother and daughter, came to look over the villa. The father and the mother were short and dumpy and fat, seeming of no particular age, the girl ethereal, of a different race, white and rose-red, simply dressed with a light blouse and a flowing blue tie on her breast. All three liked the house but you could see that what mattered to the parents was that their daughter should be content. She wandered round, looked at everything, picked a leaf from the cedar tree and a late wistaria flower ; then asked pardon, blushing at having behaved as if the house were already hers.

"Is your daughter quite well ?" Grei asked, not suspiciously but just to say something.

"Yes, now she is quite well" both parents answered together, but they could not forbear looking at her anxiously. "She has been rather tired. She has had to interrupt her work, just for this year. The teachers at the Conservatorium are so exacting."

Once or twice the girl turned pale and then quickly red again. She felt that Signora Grei's suspicious eyes were on her, and, to distract attention, turned to him.

"You could have a beautiful harbour here, Signor Grei," she remarked, making an effort to be animated, "so that one could sit and read in the shade. You would have no objection ?"

Conversation became a little strained. The callers went away, pretending to take seriously the suggestion that they should all meet at Milan to settle matters "eventually."

"No, no," said Signora Grei to her husband when they were alone, shaking her head with an air of authority. "The girl is ill."

"The churchyard is close enough," he observed. Then, with quick remorse, he added : "In that case, we had better sell. It is out of the question to let."

And he was not happy until he had sold *The Haven* to that very family. He was sorry that other people were after the house, and kept them in play, inventing excuses and objections to put them off, and to be able to keep the house for the poor little sick pianist. To himself he called her by her Christian name, Ada, and imagined her leaning on the parapet of the terrace or sitting with a book on her lap in the new *Haven*. Perhaps this obstinate preference for her cost him a good many pounds.

"After all," he observed to his wife, "a house is sacred. I should hate to let it go to strangers or to detestable people who spoil one's very memories of the place. Don't you agree?"

She let him talk, while she made a list of articles not included in the contract which she wished to take away with her to her town house. There was one special chair she was set on having, which remained in its place until the day of the move to be packed up and sent off by the workmen.

"Why ever do you want it?" he asked, "with that canary yellow, I can't see where you will put it."

"I shall have it re-covered," his wife answered. "It is the shape I like."

The move took place on a warm May morning. Ada wandered about, picked a leaf from the cedar tree, a flower from the lilac bush, without asking anyone's pardon this time. Her hair, chestnut and fine, was a little ruffled; Grei would have liked to smooth it for her.

Following her, he entered the house for the last time, and could not resist the temptation to say to her.

"Would you like to keep this chair? I really don't want it. Perhaps—your mother would like. I am afraid," he added, "the piano is not very good. It has rather a harsh sound, but you will get used to it. The lake makes one tolerant."

The boat by which the Greis left coasted the shore for a little while. When they were just off *The Haven* they could hear swift harmonies leaping out like a flight of swallows. Encouraged by the music and by the noise of the boat's en-

gine, he resolved to tell his wife, with an air of indifference, the incident of the little chair.

"Evidently," said his wife, "you have left your heart behind at *The Haven*."

At first he was hurt at this indulgent irony in which there was no note of jealousy. Then he was ashamed at his own emotion, which he would not define but which was certainly romantic and late-flowering. For a few minutes he was silent, but at last said to his wife, looking away from her, "I love her as I might love a daughter of mine who was ill. She will get better."

The house, rose-coloured and square-built, was already almost hidden in the trees. Only five years had passed since the day when he was sure he would never leave it, since those four walls made up a unity with his life and the lives of his children. Now he only wanted to get away and to forget. He could have thrown his luggage into the lake, to feel himself lighter, renewed. To possess nothing, to begin life again. To go away.

The landing-bell signalled the approach to the other shore. As if gazing unexpectedly on the horizon, he discovered the melancholy of his years ; for he was neither young nor old. Fifty, not old enough to stay, not young enough to go. Too young for serenity ; too old for love.

(From "*La Città Sconosciuta*." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)

E. L. MORSELLI
(1882-1921)



(I)

WEALTH

(Translated by —)

YESTERDAY, by way of amusing myself, I caught a cicada and told it the famous fable of the Ant and the Grasshopper.

The cicada listened in silence until I had finished and then said :

“This fable only shews to what an extent you men covet wealth. We, however, know no other wealth except what each of us receives at birth. Our great wealth is song, and we sing without restraint, not to please men—who calumniate us in their silly fable—but to please the Sun, who loves us. It is a queer fancy, to think that we should knock at the door of the parsimonious ant ! Perhaps to be able to go on living a mean life during the winter ? ! But the Sun goes far away, in winter, and he would be unable to hear us sing : so it is useless for us to live ! Or it might be to sing again when next summer comes ? ! But that would be superfluous, for do you not see that, though we ourselves die, our song never does ? We have sown every valley with it, and when the Sun gets near again he will be greeted by fresher and more sonorous voices than ours. How could we, then, be sorry to die ? And how could we desire the hard-earned and squalid riches that you and the ants love so much ? ”

So saying the cicada flew away.

(II)

QUIETISM

(Translated by —)

I WAS in a town, seated at the table of an inn, eating a great dish of oysters. Suddenly I heard a voice, rather faint but very near. Guess what it was ! It was an oyster which, on seeing me, had been taken by a lyric mood, and began to preach :

“O you relentless searchers after Glory, Gold,
Happiness, Love, Pleasure—hopeless foolish men !
See in me the pattern of a happy life !”

You may imagine how I pricked up my ears, and how my Æsopian spirit, that I sadly drag along with me through the silent world of to-day, rose within me. I was happy to hear that extraordinary speech. And the illustrious oyster, leaning out of its half shell, which I held up with three fingers, went on talking as if from a pulpit :

“I do not know of whom I was born, and I do not care a bit. The first thing I met in my life was a post, and to that post I stuck. I would still be there if they had not pulled me away from it.

“With a little patience I built this house, just big enough to hold myself : all nice and polished within for me, ugly and scaly without for the others.

“Some fish, big and foolish like you, passing near me, told me that the sea is big, that there are so many things to see ; but I shut myself in at once, without even replying. What do you want me to look at ? When I am thirsty I open my house and water pours in ; when I am hungry I open my house and certain small wandering creatures walk into it, these I eat at my ease. Tell me, untiring searchers after happiness, builders of dreams, can you do as I do ?

"When I hear the waves beginning to stir all round, when it happens that the waters are reddened by some fight taking place near by, I shut myself well within my house, and do not open until I am sure the water is still and clean again. Tell me, you foolish people who fight in darkness, obstinate knights following strange adventures, is not my way much wiser than yours ?

"I never spoke a word of love : And yet, without suffering any of your love's labours, I have peopled my whole post with a quantity of oysters—which, thank God, all think like me and will live happily. Tell me, intoxicated and fruitless lovers . . ."

But, at this moment, I had not time to wink an eye before I saw the fanatical preacher disappear behind the wonderful row of teeth of a lady table-neighbour, and its pulpit fall under the table.

The killer laughed, as one laughs when he kills an enemy : and I—what could I do ?—I laughed too. . . .

Those who in the meanest necessities of life find the whole reason of life ; those who deny life without having experienced it ; those who flee the world, not because their hearts are full of disgust and they have wept away all their tears, but only because they know that one hour of joy must be paid for with a hundred hours of grief ; when they dare to censure the men who, living and fighting in the world, make mistakes, they deserve indeed to end like that oyster.

(From "Favole per i re d'oggi." Firenze, Vallecchi, Publishers.)



CAROLA PROSPERI

(1883-)



(I)

THE SCHOOLMISTRESS

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

IT was raining. The village already hidden at the bottom of the valley seemed to have become nothing but one puddle, with its muddy threshing-floors, its deserted paths and fields ; the houses shut while the women remained in the outbuildings to spin and the men had gone to the neighbouring village where there was a railway station and two inns. There was no sound but the soft dripping of the rain, slow, monotonous, endless. . . .

A few minutes to four the door opened in a cottage that was even lower than the rest, a mere hovel on the edge of the village, with broken window-panes mended with paper stuck on, and an outside staircase all worm-eaten ; out of the door came five or six children, their papers under their arms. While they were scattering this way and that, bending under the rain, walking with the slow gait of the peasant, the teacher, erect and motionless on the threshold, stood and watched them. She was a middle-aged woman ; unmarried, pale and wan, with a long faded face, on which an expression of chill sadness was habitual. In front of all that leaden grey-ness she seemed to shiver, hid her hands under her apron, stretched out her head to look round. No one. She closed the school door, mounted the wooden stair and went into the place where she lived, a vast squalid room which served as both bedroom and sitting-room.

For a while the scene was again deserted. Just once, when

the rain was falling with greater violence, a yellowish curtain was lifted and the face of the teacher appeared for a moment behind the window-pane.

Later, at about five o'clock, a human being did finally appear at the end of the road in the deserted countryside ; a tall and elegant youth, with the collar of his coat turned up and gloves on his hands. He was careful to avoid the puddles, jumping from one side of the road to the other, and he looked anxiously at his shoes, disgusted that he had to step into mud. On arriving at the wooden staircase he gave a sigh of relief, shook himself like a wet dog, and climbed it in two steps.

"It is I, Paola. Are you in the dark?"

"Is that you, Ugo?"

The schoolmistress—a dim and motionless shape by the table—rose and lit a little oil lamp which cast a fitful light over the room. Meanwhile Ugo grumbled at the weather and the annoyances of the journey, looking round for the most suitable part of the floor on which to rest the handsome handle of his open umbrella.

"I say, have you a rag or something, I could wipe my shoes with? I can't have my shoes all muddy."

She herself cleaned them for him, kneeling silently before him, while the lad protested :

"But no ! You shouldn't do that !"

Bending thus she asked him :

"Are they all well at home? What do they want now?"

"They are all well. I have a mass of letters to give you. Augusta wanted to write to you too, but she had no time. She says she is still waiting for those stockings you promised her, and that she is needing them now. Here they are."

He handed her the letters, then began to pace up and down to get warm, his hands in his pockets and his head sunk between his shoulders.

"Ugh, how cold and wet it is !" he said every now and then, stamping his feet.

His sister looked at him. He was a fine lad of sixteen, lithe and well-made, with a pleasant rosy face, high white fore-

head and clear limpid eyes, seeming already a man but still full of child-like gaiety. As she looked at him Paola thought of his infancy, and saw him again as he was then, tiny, adorable smiling, so radiant with freshness and grace that her heart melted with tenderness for him. The baby had loved her too and would stay quiet in no other arms but hers. Ah, then, how he used to hold her fast, kissing her face all over and clinging to her with his little fat hands, and how he cried if he saw her cry! Now he never kissed her, and he would never have come of his own accord to see her, if his mother and sisters had not sent him.

"Aren't you reading the letters?"

"I can pretty well imagine what they want."

She read, standing up near the light. Her mother had a muddled little writing all flourishes and hieroglyphics.

". . . how am I to manage? What shall I say to your father? We already owe the maid several months' wages. It is a miracle that she still keeps quiet. Send me what you have. You must admit that I have not asked you for anything for a long time. It is your duty as a good daughter. . . ."

She put the note aside. She seemed to see her mother writing hastily at a corner of the desk, dressed in a beautiful blue gown, her hat on her head, gloves held in one hand, breaking off to order the maid to bring coffee, or to scold the girls, and every now and then lifting her veil that would keep falling over her eyes, or rubbing her forefinger across her brow to remove the powder.

Then Renata had written, beautiful Renata, whose engagement had lasted four years and who was ruining the family with all the costly trifles for her trousseau. Renata the arrogant, who had never done a day's work in her life but took it as a matter of course that everyone should work for her. Renata the vain, for whom nothing was beautiful enough, nothing costly enough.

". . . I hope you have finished those few yards of lace. I still want (1) three yards of Renaissance lace for my sitting-room curtains, (2) a dozen embroidered napkins, (3)"

Paola read no further, and gave hardly a glance at the last note, that of her sister Clementina, a hypochondriac, who was always wanting to buy pills and tonics and always grumbling about her imaginary ailments.

Her brother stood and looked at her, and, seeing that she had finished reading, thought he had better remind her.

"Augusta asks you to remember the stockings. . . ."

Paola raised her head ; her face was blotched with red on the cheekbones, her eyes shone ; her mouth no longer fresh, cut as with the stroke of a knife, with thin pallid lips, gave her an odd, hard look.

"And papa ? How is he ?"

Ugo shrugged his shoulders.

"Just the same."

The father, invalidish, apathetic, resigned, had nothing to ask of her, and never wrote to her at all.

"Do you have a good time ?"

"Well, what do you think ? I have to work ! The girls amuse themselves in the evenings as best they can. Renata's fiancée, that lamp-post of a man, drops in, with a friend. Augusta plays the piano, Clementina grumbles—the usual babel. I take refuge in my room. It is not much fun for me. If I don't work, mother is always at me."

"You're a man," snapped his sister. "You ought to work. You can't sit and wait for good luck to come along, as the girls can. And besides we are poor, really poor."

"I know that," the lad answered, a little taken aback at her outburst. And he added with a gracious air of importance, "I shall work."

They were silent for a few minutes. She had taken up a stocking and was knitting quickly ; from time to time a bitter smile curved her lips without unsealing them. Ugo looked round him, and his heart sank strangely.

"What a place to live in !"

And as if he saw it all for the first time, he stared in dismay at the vast and squalid room, the miserable furniture, the bare walls, the bed in a corner behind a primitive screen, the

sofa with the stuffing coming out, and a pail full of water, against a wall. He thought of their house in the city full of noise and people, where the creditors were continually knocking at the door, but without being able to sadden the lives of their debtors because everyone thought of himself and did nothing for anyone else. A babel, yes, but full of gaiety. He felt his fresh ingenuous soul grow dark.

"Can't I go now?"

"It is raining too hard. Sleep on my bed. I will sleep on the sofa."

"But. . . ."

"The road is dark."

"But it is so cold here."

"Oh, hardly at all. . . . Are you so sensitive? What would you do here, then, in the winter?"

Ugo did not answer, and his sister went on knitting without looking up.

"Are you working for Augusta?"

"Don't you see that these are stockings for a little girl?"

What melancholy, what chill entered into the young man's soul as he sat near that sister who had once been so loving and tender towards him, and who was now so pale and hard, who looked at him coldly and spoke to him with bitterness! Not a ray of light shone through the window; it seemed as if the grey swollen clouds had come right down on the earth.

Someone knocked and came in: two little girls, holding hands. They looked like twins: both with a black dress patterned in white flowers, hair of the same peasant-blond, streaked with dark and burnt by the sun, and braided in a stiff plait; they had thin faces, eyes a little red and without lashes, the forehead bare of eyebrows. The bigger of the two placed on the table a little basket covered with a red kerchief, then took her sister by the hand again and stood motionless, without making any attempt to go.

"Do you want the basket?"

Together both little girls nodded, yes. Paola took out what

there was : eggs, cheese, chestnuts, and put inside two thick pairs of stockings.

"Tell your father that teacher says *yes*. You understand?"

Again, they both bent their heads at the same moment, then went away as silently as they had come, making an infernal clatter with their sabots on the wooden staircase.

It amused Ugo to watch them, as he sat huddled up in a corner of the sofa.

"Do you teach those little brats? Heavens!"

Paola was laying the table; she spread a rough cloth, put out two coarse plates, some knives and forks, a jug of milk, a bottle full of weak sweet coffee, and the loaf.

Ugo ate hungrily, she just sipped a little milk.

"What a little you eat!" the lad cried in astonishment.

"All these years I feel as if my throat were closed!" she answered, and got up to go to the cupboard.

"Listen to me. . . ."

"Suppose we go to bed now?" Ugo yawned again, shivering.

"You must listen to me first. This letter is for you to give to mother. This parcel is for Renata, and this other one, which has the stockings in, for Augusta. I can't give you anything for Clementina. I am not writing, but you can tell them what I have to say."

Ugo yawned.

"I am so sleepy and so cold, Paola!"

"Tell them that they are not to ask anything more of me. Now I have nothing of my own. You can turn the place upside down, you won't find a halfpenny or a stick of mine. As for the future, say I shall no longer be mistress of my time or of what I earn."

"Oh, well . . . why?"

"Because I am getting married."

Ugo jumped up, shouted out "Oh!" and his face shone with a fleeting smile of astonishment and derision.

"You're going to get married!"

It seemed as if he meant to say: "Gracious, whatever story is this?"

The heart of the poor old maid shuddered at this fresh blow and she felt again the smart of all the old wounds.

Who had ordained at her birth that her destiny should be renunciation, humility and sacrifice? She had had to pay the price of being born virtuous and intelligent among people who were unscrupulous, despotic and rash, people who cared for nothing but idleness and the pleasures of life; and when the household, worse than a boat with leaks in every side, had been on the point of shipwreck, she alone had made up her mind to go. What torture during the long years of adverse fortune! Then a little of the semblance of prosperity had come back to the house, but she, on the advice of all her family, had gone on working. Since she was blessed with the ability to earn, let her earn! And all her relations were ready enough to fall on her like vultures. Oh, if they had been able to squeeze more out of her, despoil her still further, take away her sleep, count every mouthful she ate, make money out of every moment of her time. . . . It was continual coming and going, an urgent demanding, exactions without respite, calls without intermission. And they said to her quite seriously:

"Lucky you, to be independent and to have no need of anyone!"

Now, on the contrary, she felt the need of someone who would defend her against her own weakness, who would say *no* for her. She felt more acutely the dumb rebellion latent for so many years, the bitterness of injustice, the rancour of slavery, all the emotions that needed to find a vent and which stirred her heart and agitated her like an unbearable pain.

"My husband," she repeated. "Does it seem so strange, even to you?"

"Not strange. . . . What will they say at home?" Amazement paralysed him. He roused himself when he heard a loud knock on the door.

"Who is there?"

"It is I," said a great voice. "May I come in, teacher?"

The schoolmistress, annoyed, got up.

"Come in. I had already said yes to your daughters. Why have you come?"

"It does not matter. I wanted to come."

He was a rough and massive creature, dressed in fustian, slow and cumbrous in his movements, with a dark, lined face. He sat down, stretched out his huge dripping sabots, and kept silence composedly, while the lad, a little pale, looked at him in astonishment and consternation. The woman, who was knitting again nervously, asked him some question in a dialect which Ugo did not understand, and the man answered slowly, enunciating the words in a low monotonous voice. The light of the lamp fell on his face, a face half asleep and reserved with small eyes unshaded by lashes, and a flat forehead behind which there must be hidden the tranquil iron obstinacy of the peasant. He hardly turned his head to look at the young man, and after a minute he got up and said good-bye, touching his hand with a big inert horny hand repulsive to Ugo, and then went out of the room slowly, his footsteps heavy, his shoulders bent. The schoolmistress stayed talking to him for a few minutes outside, came back, closed the door and said to her brother :

"Would you like to go to bed now?"

He had not moved. Breathing deeply, agitated, he asked with a voice in which sobs were trembling :

"Is that the man you are going to marry?"

"That is the man."

"A peasant ! He's a widower ? You're mad ! But, Mother, think of it, Mother——"

"She will make the best of it," Paola answered, and then shouted at him : "What do you know about it ? Try and spend ten autumns and ten winters here, alone, do you hear ? Alone ! Try and work for others and live in loneliness. I don't want to see any of you any more. I never want to hear from any of you again."

As she went on talking her voice grew higher, more strident, sharp, dolorous, like a cry of physical pain ; she went on lamenting, wringing her hands, rolling her eyes, moaning and

crying as with a fit of hysterics, while she repeated over and over again the same sentence.

"I never wish to see any of you again !"

Then, suddenly, all her excitement passed. She wiped her face, loosened her collar, turned down the light.

"Go to bed."

Ugo obeyed. But when he was in bed, behind the rough grey screen, he began to cry, softly at first, then louder and yet louder, with long sobs full of anguish that he could not restrain, Oh, what misery without end, what infinite despair ! How terrible and cruel life seemed to him ! Everything filled him with horror ; his people, the false luxury of his home, the insolence of the creditors, his family's decayed estate, his own dark and fearsome future, the destiny of this sister who was about to be a bride. The thoughtless youth, full of health and hope, felt all the weariness of life weighing on him, with such bitterness, such desolation, such burning emotions of pity and affection that he verily wished to die then and there, with his heart broken.

She came to console him. With mournful tenderness she pressed his beautiful head against her thin breast and kissed the hot swollen eyes that had shed tears for her. She kissed him as she had kissed when he had been a baby, with violence, with pity, breathing the perfume of his lovely innocent youth ; and only when the boy had fallen asleep, did she in her turn shed the coldest and bitterest tears that had ever fallen from her eyes.

So Paola married a labourer and became the stepmother of two little peasant girls. She was dead to the world, as if she had been a nun, but without the consolations of the cloister ; she was as one buried alive, without the peace of the grave. She was cast off and forgotten. Her brother alone, in spite of the various vicissitudes and changes of fortune through which he made his way in the world, remembered her ; but his picture of her was as dim as of a creature that had vanished many years since, a ghost that had passed away, the shadow of a shadow.

(From "Vocazioni." Milano, Fratelli Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

LACK OF GRAVITY

(Translated by E. D'ESTERRE-STAHLE)

No confusion, no noise, nothing of the usual agitation that upsets a household on similar occasions. Complete tranquillity. In the morning as soon as she was up, Augusta, letting herself drop into an easy chair, had stammered—as she looked about her in bewilderment, and wrung her hands with a convulsive movement :

“I think—I think I feel worse than usual !”

“Good !” her mother-in-law had exclaimed majestically. “Very good ! That means that we are here. . . .”

Everything had been arranged in a few moments, with the dexterity and experience of serious persons who don't lose their heads in any circumstances. The midwife had been summoned, the widowed sister-in-law was on the spot, the unmarried sister-in-law sent away to a neighbour, the servants were alert, father-in-law settled in the dining-room, waiting to be called, Claudio—the husband—paler and more worried-looking than usual, was arranging his tie before the looking-glass with nervous hands and thinking should he or should he not go to the office ? He was a young man, tall and rather thick-set, with black hair and a fair moustache, almost red ; dark ; round eyes, a large aquiline nose, square jaws, and he had an expression of satisfied presumption and solemn severity. He dressed with banal elegance.

“Decidedly I shall not go,” he said to himself and entered his wife's bedroom, trying to give to his face a ceremonious air, compassionate and encouraging at the same time.

“Augusta is so lacking in gravity and courage. She lets herself be cast down so easily !”

He called her with a voice which was meant to be at once

caressing and masterful—the sort of tone which he had used one time with a little dog which he was teaching to stand on its hind legs, and which he meant to master.

“Up, Augusta, up—courage !”

She, walking up and down the room, supported under her arms by two women, while the others were busy preparing the bed of pain, turned to look at him silently. Her face was livid and her eyes had the look of anguish and terror of an animal caught in a trap, while her mouth was contracted in a spasm of unuttered complaint. Certain it was that he would never be able to forget that face—that expression of a creature entirely abandoned, heart-struck among all these strange people.

With a certain embarrassment he noted that his words of encouragement were scarcely appropriate, and he gathered that for the moment he was the least useful member of the household.

His mother, pale of face, with black hair, round eyes, aquiline nose, the same hard expression on her face, the same stature, the same carriage, went towards him with the air of an expert matron.

“Go, go,” she said ; “you are not wanted, you may return towards seven o’clock—not sooner.”

Obediently he went, with serious manner, but without being able entirely to overcome a certain anxiety. “If only Augusta had more courage !” and he added to himself, “If she were only a little bit like me !”

But Augusta was not like him in the least. Furthermore, this diversity, which was so visible between them, was the cause of much profound astonishment to those who knew them—however did they come to marry ?

Claudio’s mother also asked herself this question, and generally added “My son, who was always so serious ever since he was a baby !”

It was very true. From babyhood Claudio had taken life seriously ; he seemed already to be a man—and an ill-humoured man too—perpetually occupied with school-work,

as afterwards with the duties of his office ; always with his nose in the copy-books, always looking that nobody was copying from him—surly and serious. He never laughed, never made jokes, and sometimes he looked with a severe expression at his father, who might attempt to repeat some story told by a colleague.

“Claudio is like me,” said his mother proudly. “He is more like me than any of the others. And how could such a young man ever come to marry a girl like Augusta ? ”

Not that Augusta was a wife to be despised. Quite the reverse. She was young, healthy, spotless, had grown up in the country, was an only daughter, had a good dowry, a graceful appearance—tall and slender, with a mass of chestnut-brown hair, a fair complexion, dimpled cheeks, a large cleft chin, two fine rosy lips, and blue eyes, serene and smiling. Smiling certainly—a bit too smiling ! They had spoilt her, she confessed so herself. Her parents had listened with ecstasy to her girlish laughter, had listened behind backs to her childish coquetries, had brought her up on kisses and caresses, without ever speaking to her of sad things, or miseries, or duties—happy in watching her while she ate or slept, in listening to her at the piano, in seeing her jump about the house, sometimes on one leg !—in hearing her laugh with her girl friends, or chatting to her canaries in front of their cage on the flower-strewn balcony. They asked nothing more of their daughter than to be beautiful and graceful, to keep her heart tender, to know how to dispense her kisses with such charm—to love and to laugh.

Oh, absolutely a faulty education—wrong from top to bottom !

Claudio’s mother, as soon as her daughter-in-law entered the house—fresh as a breeze of spring, with eyes still wet with the tears shed at parting from her parents, but lips already open in a smile—had stood a while in perplexity, and suddenly thought, “This girl cannot have been taught much gravity.” And later, when she spoke of this doubt to her son, she had been somewhat reassured on having his answer :

"Well, mamma, we will undertake her education. Augusta is made of good stuff."

Yes, she was made of good stuff, if somewhat too tender, and too malleable for these hard hands. She too, when she entered this house, had recognised that all parents were not like hers, who now—poor things!—were crying in their deserted house; but the gaiety of her spirit was so spontaneous that she could not all at once conform to the cold gravity of her surroundings, where no one laughed, and no one spoke a word more than was necessary.

For a short time she had gone on laughing, had run from one window to another, had chatted and offered the caresses of her white hands, and the kisses of her fresh young mouth, with a lack of gravity that scandalised all in the house. And all of them—the in-laws, the husband, the widowed sister-in-law who was melancholy, and the unmarried sister-in-law who was nervy—had taken it upoh themselves, as a sacred duty with zeal and ardour to cultivate in her this gravity that was so lacking, until one by one the laughs had been smothered, the smiles exhausted, the hands that had bestowed caresses accustomed themselves to lie folded in her lap, the fresh young mouth had learnt to be silent and the eyes to see things in a different way. It had cost a fine lot of trouble, but at all events this education had now been accomplished. At present she was not bad. Augusta now knew when to move and when to speak, and her frightened eyes were always fixed on her husband's face, as if to read there the commands and orders which it was her duty to execute.

Only—as Claudio kept thinking, always under the weight of a certain inquietude—if only she could have a little courage . . .

And he sighed and shook his head, recognising that courage, above all in these circumstances, was even more difficult than gravity.

He had arrived mechanically at the door of his office. He entered. The porter was dozing in the antechamber; two clerks, the youngest ones, had taken advantage of the unusual

absence of the Chief, and, sure not to see him till to-morrow, had gone off. There only remained the senior, an old man, slightly deaf, ex-soldier, erect, stiff, with a wooden face, wrinkled, and having small shifting eyes veiled by sadness. He was an excellent clerk, silent, active and precise as a machine. On seeing the Chief enter, he rose, but showed not the faintest surprise when Claudio, with a most unusual cordiality, clapped a hand on his shoulder, saying :

"Here we are, Captain !"

"Good, good !" replied the old man, in his low, even voice.

"A boy ?"

"Oh, we don't know yet !"

And Claudio started laughing. "Until this evening we cannot know anything—at least, so my mother says, and she understands these things."

"Certainly, certainly."

"Not till this evening."

The Captain had resumed his work with lowered head, and Claudio endeavoured to imitate him—but did not succeed.

He felt, as had never happened to him before, the desire to speak, to move about, to communicate with someone—looking every moment at the clock, impatient and surprised by the slow passage of time. But he controlled himself and remained at his post. What the devil ! Should he—*he*—provide a spectacle of such a lack of gravity ? He re-seated himself, but instead of writing he planted his elbows on the table, leaned his chin on his hands and began to speak to the Captain, who gave no reply, but every now and then nodded his head in respectful approval.

"A boy or a girl ? It really does not matter. I am indifferent. The thing that matters is education, Captain ; and the education should begin early, almost, you might say, from the first days of the baby's life. The baby very soon learns whether he will be master, or whether he will be mastered. He feels at once the strength of the hand that guides him. Ah, I assure you, we have a firm hand, Captain. I don't say anything about my wife—she, poor thing !—yes, she is different from us.

She was brought up in another atmosphere. Although she has become much more uniform with us—yes, but she is still rather different. For the rest, the child's education will not be directed by her—but by me. And I can assure you that my son will not become like one of those youths who, at sixteen, already have the hall-door key, and can go to café-concerts and gaming tables ; and that my daughter will not become like those girls who strut about the streets with tight skirts and high-heeled shoes, instead of staying at home to knit the stockings."

He raged on against modern youth, against the weakness of parents, against the general frivolity, and became quite eloquent. One heard in his voice the satisfaction, the bitterly voluptuous joy of one who has had an aversion from the joys of life, and who now at last will be able to exercise, over two beings belonging to him, the delights of implacable severity, of systematic contradiction, of unlimited tyranny. He was tasting this joy in advance while repeating, with his satisfied smile :

"The firm hand, Captain ! Is it not so ?"

"It is so. It is so !"

"But this will be nothing new to you, old soldier. It must have been the same in your family ?"

For a moment the old man did not answer, then he said, in a voice that sounded still more weary and worn : "I have had the misfortune of losing all my family and remaining alone. So it is a different thing, and one sees things in a different light."

He was silent. A cold breeze had passed through the room and Claudio shivered—became suddenly speechless, and started writing with a strong effort of will.

There was a long silence. Some hours passed, and in the evening the Captain went away after putting all his papers in order.

Claudio remained a moment longer—then he too went off with slow steps. He did not want to arrive too soon, nor yet too late—but just in time.

* * *

He arrived to find the house all upside down. The doors wide open, the terrified face of his mother, who rushed to meet him, panting and trembling—

“Just this moment—delirium—we have telephoned—he was not there—the baby was still-born.”

“But who is singing like this ?” he cried, grinding his teeth.

“She.”

In the bed, Augusta—her face distorted—was singing wildly, deliriously—stopping every moment to laugh with a horrible gaiety. She was quivering and pressing her head into the pillows, squeezing something, livid and unformed, against her body—a bundle that at first Claudio could not distinguish.

“What is it ?”

“The baby.”

The husband, holding his head between his hands, bent over his wife and called her :

“Augusta.”

She gave no answer, but looked at him and laughed—then she looked at the others and laughed again. She seemed to be defying them all with ironical delight.

Then she saw no one.

She looked away—far, far, into the darkness—into the void—and she saw a glorious sun—a scintillation of rays ; fields of gold—of scarlet flowers. And she heard the song of larks—of her canaries. She saw the flowering balcony—a world far off—superbly gay, towards which she was running lightly—lightly—with lifted face—her hair fluttering in the breeze—her baby pressed to her breast—singing with joy like a liberated slave.

(From “ La Felicità in Gabbia.” Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)



MARINO MORETTI

(1885-)



(I)

THE GALA NIGHT

(Translated by Miss M. G. FORGAN)

W H E N Elvira Candoli-Cattoli, the famous prima donna, had made a thorough tour of the little town with Felice Cattoli, her lawful spouse who played the double-bass, she was quite satisfied and said :

“I think they are nice people.”

Everyone had looked at her and, perhaps, admired her ; a man had smiled. She wandered past cafés, butchers’ shops, tobacconists’, barbers’ shops, and surveyed them with the lofty air of a beautiful woman (a little stout) who looks at nothing but takes in everything. Only a smile curled the red mouth from which would issue the treasure of her amazingly beautiful voice.

“Yes, nice people.”

She was satisfied : she was glad she had accepted this contract.

True, Elvira Candoli-Cattoli was always willing to sing in little provincial towns. There an opera was an event ; the prima donna was a wonderful being who had enraptured the public in every theatre in the world, who had captivated princes, and acquitted men condemned to death ; there she had nothing to worry about, no fierce rivals, no over-bold

admirers. The spectators were frankly her slaves, and the names of the young men most in evidence were more famous than the tenors of Verdi and Donizetti. There was always a hotel, the Golden Lion, or the Golden Sword, or the Golden Cup, or something gold or gilded, where there were a manageress and her daughter consumed with admiration, a servile waiter, and inquisitive strangers. Elvira Candoli-Cattoli did not like big towns ; she found them vulgar and ignorant about music : but this did not apply to foreign cities, which were delightful, so polite, so appreciative.

"On the whole, either abroad or in the provinces," she told her lawful spouse, who angled for contracts.

This time he had no great difficulty in pleasing Cattoli. A single opera, "The Bride of Lammermoor," which she was to sing again and again, obscure colleagues, an obsequious agent, a job for her husband, a hideous harpist . . . and nice people. Among these nice people there were the theatre managers, which was a rare occurrence. How many were there ? Eight, ten ; perhaps twelve ; perhaps more. She had shaken hands with a great many with the smile of a woman who has a fortune in her vocal chords, and each of these hands, none too smooth, was the hand of a manager.

"You see, illustrious signora, what a beautiful little theatre we have ! Isn't it a pity to keep it shut ? Of course, there is no shortage of theatrical companies or conjurers who generally ask for contracts : but you'll understand, these people do not attract much public, and then we must make a collection to drive them away. We need opera. We love music.

"'Verranno a te sull' aure. . . .' What an exquisite air ! But opera costs money and no one is prepared to risk a half-penny. So we Revivalists have decided to experiment with a certain outlay. . . . We will lose ? No matter : a slight loss for each. . . . But we will have the satisfaction of having stimulated our little town by letting it hear an artiste . . . an artiste like you. . . ."

Who was it who said that ? Elvira Candoli-Cattoli listened to these words spoken in a monotonous drawling voice. Who

was it? One of the managers, one of the Revivalists. Nice people. At the rehearsals she examined her fellow artistes, who were not nice people. She surveyed them absent-mindedly as if she were apt to confuse the tenor with the bass, the baritone with the mezzo-soprano (who was a lady, naturally). Only with the producer was she less dreamy, perhaps because the producer graciously allowed her just to whisper her part so as not to waste the fresh warbling of a nightingale which was enclosed in her throat, like a cuckoo in a clock.

She had not even noticed Sandrino Vannelli, the second tenor. At one point she did see a curious little man who kept on gesticulating and stretching his neck; but when she left the theatre she could not connect any features with these gestures and the long neck. And yet Sandrino Vannelli had always surrounded her with dumb respect and moving admiration. To him, an unsophisticated secondary singer, Elvira Candoli-Cattoli was indeed a celebrity. He remembered seeing her portrait in a newspaper in a dentist's waiting-room before having a tooth out: it took up the whole page with a voluminous ermine cloak and a sweeping snake-like train. And now like everyone else, like all the worthy town-folk filled with music, he paused in front of the modest windows of drapers, sweet-shops and upholsterers to admire the photographs of the beautiful goddess in the costumes of her soprano repertoire. They all recognised the opera at once. Rosina . . . Amina . . . Norina . . . Suzel with a basket of cherries . . . Lucy in the first act . . . and in the second . . . in the scene of madness. . . . She was magnificent!—a little stout, but what did that matter? The others were remarking: "There's a beautiful woman," or: "A fine figure of a woman," or "She ought to be able to sing!" And he, Sandrino Vannelli, the second tenor, who was to play the rôle of Arthur, Lucy's betrothed, felt his heart beat like a sledge hammer, and reddened with delight, as he had done when he saw his name printed in large letters on the notice.

He often stopped in front of that notice in the course of his reverent pilgrimage. He liked to mix among the people who

were commenting on it. Sandrino would read the names, and then he would come back and read them again :—

Soprano :	Candoli-Cattoli Elvira.
Mezzo-Soprano :	Moschini Aida.
Tenor :	Nalia Cesare.
Baritone :	Turbiglio Ulisse.
Bass :	Pellecchi Giulio.
Second Tenor :	Vanelli Alessandro.

What a pity ! They had missed out an “n” in his surname ! To balance it they had given an extra “z” to the author, Donizetti.

Second Tenor : Vannelli Alessandro. . . .

He kept repeating these four words, infinitely sweet, in the course of his reverent pilgrimage. He thought of his mother who could not read. He thought of his mother who did not know what a printed name meant. He thought of the thin pale face of the little woman who did not understand and who could not believe it possible to earn a living by singing. They had said to her : “Your son is in the chorus.” And she had answered without conviction, “My son is in the chorus.” (She would have liked to say : “My son is a carpenter.”) But her son did not like the word “chorus.”

“Mother,” he said, “try and remember I am a second singer.” And his mother, humble and unconvinced, repeated “A second singer.” And now she would have to change again.

“Mother, try and remember if anyone asks you what I am, I am second tenor.”

This time the poor woman would understand, would hug him, and would be proud of him. He would explain to her : “You see, Mother, now I don’t sing with the others any longer ; I sing a solo, I have a part of my own in the opera. . . . Do you understand what a part means ? It means that you come on to the stage alone, sing alone and walk about alone ; you have a name. . . . Now you see I am called Arthur not Sandrino . . . for a joke . . .”

He spoke aloud, imagining it all. Then he forgot about the beautiful scene and the fine words and was terrified of doing the wrong thing. He was afraid that the rôle of Arthur,

Lucy's betrothed, was too difficult for him. Arthur had not many songs, nor had he much to do. He only appeared in the second act gorgeously attired because he was to marry Lucy. (He was to have married her, but Edgar, the first tenor, suddenly entered and prevented the wedding). But he certainly had to come on at a very critical moment ; and last but not least he had to sing his little lyric :

Per poco fra le tenebre
Sparì la vostra stella ;
Io la farò risorgere
Più fulgida e più bella

It ended on a high note. And it was just that high note that terrified him. At the rehearsals sometimes it came, and sometimes it did not come, and he would stand there with his long neck, scarlet in the face, with an agonised smile.

The producer said nothing ; he paid no attention to these trifles.

* * *

They had a great success, including Sandrino. The high note was unfortunate, but he was a success all the same. They liked him. His fine feathers of a betrothed nobleman filled him with a resigned but impassioned humility, and the young ladies in the boxes noticed him, and thought that Miss Lucy Ashton did not use Arthur Bucklaw as he deserved. The wronged and disappointed lover delighted the pit, and what is more important, he delighted the gallery. There might have been hissing ; instead there was affectionate applause. The public in the fourth circle realised that this Scottish nobleman of the sixteenth century was one of themselves, a hard-up member of the working-classes whom Fate—or some such power—had placed there beside a stout and distinguished prima donna. They also gathered that they could not take any liberties with the Signora Candoli-Cattoli, nor flatter the tenor unduly, nor joke with the terrible Turbiglio, nor be too free and easy with Lucy's tutor and confidant, the deep bass. So there was only Sandrino left, who was to raise

the fortunes of the house of Ashton. So they called him by name—Sandrino ! Sandrino ! and shouted "Bravo" and encouraged him, and overwhelmed him with applause. He was cheered as much as the other tenor. And as the sextet and the act finished, and the curtain was raised half-way for the performers to make their bows to the delighted public, he found himself standing between Elvira Candoli-Cattoli, who was swathed in veils, and the trembling Edgar Ravenswood still wrapped in his dark cloak : between the two protagonists the tenor and the prima donna—"If only poor mother could see me now," he thought during that protracted moment. But no, his poor mother would not have understood. . . .

"Why ? Who knows . . ." he murmured, after his success when he was in the chorus' dressing-room, still in the manner of Lord Arthur Bucklaw. He smiled to himself, and the leader of the chorus, a fat soulless man who also had a small part, glanced slyly at him and laughed with the other wretched chorus men. . . . "You're getting on fine, aren't you, Sandrino ? You're making progress. Carry on ! Next time you'll be Edgar . . . At Serrastretta, at Caccamo. . . . Did you know there was a place called Caccamo ?" And the wretched chorus men laughed at him, while they undressed and put on the drab night clothes of the inhabitants of Lammermoor. . . .

They laughed, but the real artistes began to take notice of him. Pellecchi the bass asked him to go for a walk with him. One day Cesare Nalia put a hand on his shoulder. Ulisse Turbiglio advised him at one of the rehearsals to say "Philip" very loud, to clear his voice. "Philip, who is Philip ?" "No one, but you must say Philip." The hideous harpist asked him what town he came from.

"From near here, Signorina. It isn't a town it's a village. . . . Ten or twelve kilometres from here."

But she was born in a beautiful city, in Florence. She was proud of being a Florentine.

As a climax Elvira Candoli-Cattoli smiled on him. . . .

Oh, that smile from Elvira Candoli-Cattoli ! It was like Lucy's smile in the first act when she sang :

"Ai miei voti amore invoco . . ."

Sandrino answered, repeating Edgar's words :

"Ai miei voti invoco il ciel !"

Then followed a duet (for Lucy sang softly with him) :

Porrà fine al nostro foco

Sol di morte il freddo gel !

Elvira Candoli-Cattoli was such an artist ! You should hear how she rivalled the flute in the mad scene ! And was there not written on her face the sign of death ? It was written in the libretto which the young ladies in the boxes held open in front of them. "Her stony glance, her convulsive speech and her ill-fated smile not only betoken terrible madness but they are the signs of a life which is drawing to its close . . ."

Indeed Elvira Candoli-Cattoli's face told a tale in that dreadful moment. Although florid, it really seemed that her life was drawing to a close. . . .

She smiled on Sandrino because she objected to Cesare Nalia. The ladies in the audience liked Cesare Nalia : he had a good figure tightly encased in a magnificent tunic ; he was strong, vigorous, dazzlingly pale ; his teeth were very white in his footlight smile. He sang out of tune ; and behind the scenes he was a rascal. Elvira Candoli-Cattoli loathed him and had no use for a public which did not differentiate between the bellowing of a maniac and the graceful trills of a goddess. She did not even deign to look at Signor Nalia, and thanked God—or the musician Donizetti—that she had only one duet with him, in the first act, beside the papier-maché fountain. Signor Turbiglio and the bass—what's his name—were not better : laborious, uncouth, grimy, half-starved. The humble little tenor who looked as if he had only just emerged from the chorus was the only one of the whole company whom she liked. Naturally he too was a waif, a poor devil, half-starved ; perhaps his shoes were in holes, perhaps he only had two meals on Sundays, and slept in a little room with two musicians, and the two musicians had the beds and

he had the camp bed. But he was kind-hearted, docile and ingenuous, and he admired her as the legitimate and unique heiress of the golden notes of ancient times, when the singers were called Pasta, Persianim Grisi. . . . (Now there remained only Candoli-Cattoli). So she had smiled to the little tenor.

One day she spoke to him. "I seem to have seen you before . . . Your face isn't new to me . . . I must have seen you somewhere . . . on the stage. . . . Oh, I know ! It was at Madrid. At the Royal. I was singing the 'Sonnambula' ; you must have been in the chorus. . . . No ?"

No : Sandrino Vannelli had never been abroad ; at least, two years ago he had been in Bellinzona . . .

"In Barcelona ?" she asked, interested for she had gathered many laurels in that lovely city.

"In Bellinzona," repeated Sandrino ; and he added humbly : "In Switzerland . . ."

She smiled, and told him that in Barcelona (in Spain) she had sung in the "Barbiere," the "Puritani," and the "Figlia del Reggimento . . ."

"The 'Figlia del Reggimento' is exquisite," said Sandrino daringly, with his eyes on the ground.

"Ah, but it does not equal the 'Bride of Lammermoor,' " she answered with dignity. "Do you know, I am so fond of this opera."

"Oh ! Signora ! It was written for you . . ."

"I love the rondò . . ."

"Oh, the rondò . . . !"

From that moment whenever Lucy was warbling to an audience of her instructor and confidant, to the terrified handmaid and to the chorus of knights and maidens, Sandrino Vannelli would take up his position in the wings, as if he were one of the mechanics or a fireman, and revel in the notes swelling from her golden throat, and the trills and tremolo which the oboe repeated, and would nod his head to indicate that everything was going splendidly, brilliantly, divinely. . . . When the theatre applauded he too would applaud. When the public wanted an encore, so did he ;

very softly, with eyes pleading, sometimes even tears, the goddess was beginning again.

Ardon gl'incensi, splendono
Le sacre faci intorno ;
Ecco il ministro ; porgimi
La destra . . . Oh lieto giorno !
Alfin son tua, sei mio

And then again a cascade of pearls pouring into a crystal bowl. And yet again frenzied applause from the public and from Sandrino. Finally the curtain.

"Thank you Vannelli," said the impassioned lady as she returned to her dressing-room.

Her lawful spouse, who had just mounted the stage, followed her grumbling :

"It's outrageous, it's disgusting ! An encore ought not to be allowed ! Let them come back another night if they want to hear the rondò again . . ."

The audience had already heard it sung twelve times in seven performances. Twice the distinguished artiste had managed to resist the sweet tyranny of her delighted and stubborn public, which consisted largely of theatre managers. All the boxes had been taken by the managers for their families. "By doing this," they said ingenuously, "we are sure of doing good business in the Box Office . . ." When the young ladies entered the boxes they bowed, they nodded, they smiled. The mothers produced opera-glasses ; the children ate caramels. The musical connoisseurs hummed the airs from other operas—more advanced operas, not so well-known, more modern. One fine young fellow with long hair was holding forth on Wagner ; but he did not succeed in convincing anyone. "The Tetralogia," he began, "has a high philosophical conception." But one of the young ladies suddenly told him to be quiet because the curtain was going up.

"Have it your own way," they said maliciously. "Now it is Signora's turn . . . What's her name ? Capperi-Cavoli . . ."

And the curtain went up.

On the eighth night the managers agreed that they must have some gala-nights with extra pieces so as to give the audience some variety. They would begin with the conductor, who was the least interesting. What would he play? The symphony from the "*Gazza Ladra*" or from "*Nabucco*" : he had not yet decided which. That would do very well : good playing without singing, it would have a limited appeal. Then the baritone's night with "O Sommo Carlo." Then Cesare Nalia with his inevitable "Cielo e mar." Then Pellecchi, the bass, with some equally inevitable song. Then the night of nights, the highest honour. What would the distinguished prima donna sing, Elvira Candoli-Cattoli? When they asked her she smiled sweetly, kind and touched, with a grave humility which was perfectly adapted to these worthy managers.

"What shall I sing?" the sweet creature trilled, making eyes at the conductor.

Sandrino Vannelli was present. He was standing apart from the others, behind the back of the double-bass, who did not believe in extra numbers. Sandrino on the other hand scrutinised the faces of the company with anxious moving gravity. He trembled. He thought of all the lyrics, all the roundelays, all the rondos included in the repertoire of the soprano. He pictured to himself Rosina, Norina, Amina, Gilda, Suzel, as if he were standing in front of the shop window which showed the portraits of the goddess. And the goddess was trilling, and making eyes at the conductor.

"What shall I sing? I will sing two lyrics : 'Fiorin D'Aprile' and another quite new one which the maestro has composed these last few days and has kindly dedicated to me . . ."

Everyone applauded the distinguished artiste and the distinguished conductor. But Sandro Vannelli was not pleased, and the double-bass muttered :

"Why must she do two numbers? The others are only doing one. . . . There's no need to take advantage of her position!"

* * *

There were five crowded houses, five great successes, five triumphs. Signora Candoli-Cattoli's ovation was not only enthusiastic, it was delirious. After the two lyrics which had been announced, she sang a popular air, and "Una voce poco fa," and three times she sang "Ardon gl'incensi." The performance finished at an impossible hour, and neither the audience nor the theatre managers would go away ; so they had to put the lights out in order to convince them that the conductor and especially the double-bass had no intention of beginning at the beginning again.

There were five memorable nights, when everyone fulfilled their obligations, the actors, the musicians, the scene-shifters, the public and the managers, who did not stint their money when it came to making presentations ; clocks, tie-pins, initialled silver knobbed canes, cigar cases, paper-knives, laurel wreaths . . . and flowers in profusion for Candoli-Cattoli, or Capperi-Cavoli as she was called by the few Wagner enthusiasts who were helping the ladies to throw bouquets from the boxes.

The distinguished artiste was moved to tears.

"It's unforgettable ! Absolutely unforgettable ! Not even at Bukharest have I experienced such an ovation, not even at Odessa or at Varsovie, where I had a record triumph. But this is still more touching. It is more simple, more unsophisticated, more sincere. . . . My friend, it is unforgettable ! Touching . . . you see I weep."

She showed her lustrous eyes to the managers, who did not quite know whether they ought to smile or remain serious. These worthies were overjoyed : on five evenings they had made from seven to eight hundred lire, and they could not have made more than five hundred or five hundred and fifty on ordinary nights. And besides this fine wave of enthusiasm had made them feel young again, even though they were fathers of families.

"We must have one more," said the most daring worthy rather timidly, while the Signora Candoli-Cattoli dried the last tear-drop with the perfumed lace of her tiny handkerchief.

"One more what?" she asked suddenly.

"One more gala night . . ."

Candoli-Cattoli frowned. She thought of her faithful handmaid Alisa ; or better still of Signorina Aida Moschini who was not hideous, and who brayed her meagre lines in the rôle of chambermaid with the unconsciously absurd coquetterie of a secondary character.

"La vicina soglia io cauta veglierò" . . . "Anxiously I will watch the neighbouring threshold."—Yes let the Signorina Moschina anxiously watch the thresholds, she was fit for nothing else. But there were no other artistes. At all costs she must avoid the danger of giving such a great satisfaction to Alisa, to a handmaid ! It would have been absurd ! A gala night for Aida Moschini, with her lyric from Mignon "Non conosci il bel suol." Shameless !

"You see, gracious signora, we are prepared to make every effort to have a good finish to the season. In order to keep up this interest and enthusiasm we must have attractions . . . as a matter of fact the attractions have come to an end . . . naturally after you . . ."

Candoli-Cattoli beat her brow, she had had an inspiration—she had found another artiste. What there were no more ? But there was Vannelli ! The man who had played the part of Lord Arthur Bucklaw and was a coming favourite ! What ? They hadn't noticed him ! They, the managers ! Vannelli ! They hadn't noticed Vannelli the tenor ! Not a very powerful voice, certainly, but a sweet thin tenor, such a graceful tenor . . . what unassuming strength !

"It's true enough . . . the signora is right . . . Vannelli . . . Arthur . . . he would do splendidly !"

They announced that there would be a gala night for the distinguished tenor Alessandro Vannelli.

Sandrino saw his name written large, in letters thirty centimetres deep, all over the town. At every street corner people were shouting that he was a distinguished tenor. Ten, fifteen, twenty times they read that he was a distinguished tenor. People in a hurry stopped to read the handsome notice

munificently put up by the provident company for their faithful public.

Sandrino was dazed. He too had read in a newspaper that "Alessandro Vannelli (tenor) had greatly distinguished himself in the difficult rôle of Arthur." In another paper he had read a more laconic account "Vannelli (as Arthur) was good, also Pellecchi (as Raymond) and the others . . ." They had put him before the bass ; as they did in the libretto. Some citizens had been proud to shake hands with him and offered him some coffee, a glass of beer, half a litre of white wine. The public of the gallery had always been faithful to him. "Bravo ! Bravo Sandrino !" A young lady had smiled to him from the box as if to encourage him. True, the high note at the end of his lyric had not sounded very good. He had always been embittered by it, and still was, for sometimes at the early rehearsals he had succeeded in producing that miserable high note. . . . It embittered poor Sandrino and ingratitude seemed to drive away all his courteous good will and kindheartedness.

"Oh, but on my gala night," he solemnly promised himself in the course of his reverent pilgrimage, "I will do it, I mean to do it !"

He thought of his poor mother, who did not understand these things. But the words "gala-night" ought to please her in a confused way. And anyhow she would understand what the applause meant :

"Don't you, Mother ? When they clap it means they think you are good ; when they hiss . . ." Now couldn't Sandrino make an effort and get his poor mother to come ? She had never seen a theatre, she had never seen her son dressed up like this. "Come on, Mother dear, put on your black dress that you had made when Father died. . . . How often have you worn it ? Three times ? Four times ? It is a long time since poor Father died. He would like you to come. There, dear, don't cry . . ." He saw she was weeping, and she ought to be glad ! "Look, darling, you must be happy. You will hear Elvira Candoli-Cattoli sing. You know she is a great

prima donna. She sings at Madrid, at Barcelona, at Bukharest, at Odessa, at Varsovie. . . . These aren't villages, they're big towns outside Italy. She goes all over the world, Elvira Candoli-Cattoli . . . what a name she has ! . . . Don't cry." His mother wept on. Then Sandrino hired a horse and a hackney carriage and in little over an hour reached the village where his mother lived.

"Sandrino !" she smiled.

"Mother, come with me. To-night you'll be at the theatre."

"Where, Sandrino ?"

"At the theatre . . ."

When he went back into the town with the horse and carriage, and his mother beside him he found a man from the opera company who had spent two or three hours looking for him.

"Vannelli ! Vannelli !"

"Here I am, at your service. . . . This is my mother. . . . What's the matter ?"

"There is something I want to ask you in confidence . . ."

"Mother, would you mind going for a little stroll. . . . Just walk up and down. I'll call you. . . . Signor, I am at your service."

"Listen, Vannelli. I am charged with a very delicate mission. The performance to-night is in your honour, and naturally we would like to make you a little present. But I imagine that your financial situation is not one that would justify our giving you a useless presentation : a stick or a cigarette-case is not very useful . . . would you be good enough to tell me frankly, without false modesty, what you really need ?"

Sandrino stood and gaped at him. He dropped his eyes, then looking up he smiled faintly and watched his mother who was walking up and down.

When he spoke he was so moved that there were tears in his voice :

"All I ask is the key of a box . . . one of the best boxes . . . for my mother."

"But . . .," began the man from the opera company.

"I want nothing else. . . . Thank you."

The man from the opera company was insistent ; then he added, "Here is the key of the box, I give it to you myself. Allow me, dear Vannelli, to pay tribute to a fine artiste whom I esteem. Now tell me, what have you most need of? Have you no suggestion to make. . . . Come now . . . something for your personal use?"

Instinctively Sandrino looked at his clothes and then at his shoes.

"Shoes?" asked the other, with a persuasive smile.

"But . . ."

"Yes, shoes . . ." (Sandrino's shoes were in holes). "Au revoir, dear Vannelli. . . . You can call your mother now."

He called his mother, but told her nothing, and that night he gave her the key of the box. Number seven, second row. They will show it to you. You will be alone with no one to bother you . . ." His mother's eyes seemed to answer "I am afraid." But Sandrino left her, because he had to get to the theatre, and had to be on the stage a little beforehand. . .

On the stage everyone smiled at him.

"Good luck, Vannelli," said Pellecchi the bass.

"Bravo, Arthur!" This from Turbiglio in his deep baritone. As he was passing Candoli-Cattoli's room he heard her liquid voice :

"Isn't that Vannelli?" He replied, trembling, and the goddess made him come into her room.

She was already transformed into Miss Lucy Ashton.

"To-night it is your turn, Vannelli, and I am delighted for your sake."

Sandrino gazed about him. He was in the dressing-room of a famous prima donna ! What a strange perfume filled her little nest ! A chorus girl had told him it was called opopanax, and that the kind of vaseline in bottles was cold cream. The half-naked breast of Elvira Candoli-Cattoli was smeared with cold cream.

"You must thank me, Vannelli. I supported the idea of your having a gala night."

"Oh, Signora . . ."

"You are pleased?"

"Indeed I am. My mother will be in the theatre."

"What a kind son." The voice of her lawful spouse was heard to approach. "Good-bye, Vannelli, au revoir."

Sandrino stood confused and perspiring in the chorus' dressing-room. The insinuating words of Elvira Candoli-Cattoli were printed on his memory. He dressed, made himself up as a Scotch nobleman in imitation of Walter Scott. But in his poor elated head there was no room for anything but the picture of those two women, so different, so far apart; his mother, timid and wasted away to nothing; the prima donna, beautiful, generously proportioned, famous. The leader of the chorus was laughing:

"I want a gala night! If I can't have one I'll go on strike!" And the other chorus' joking took up the refrain "We'll go on strike!" But Sandrino had always before him the two women different and far apart, and he heard that trilling voice perfumed with opopanax: "What a kind son! I am so glad for your sake . . ."

The chorus rushed off in a mob, because the curtain was going up and they had to sing their hunting song:

"Percorriamo le spiagge vicine . . ."

Arthur waited in the chorus' dressing-room until Lord Henry Ashton should bring him into Lucy's presence. . .

At last he appears, at Henry's side.

He glanced for a moment at the audience. The theatre was filled to overflowing. The gallery was seething with people, the pit was crammed, the boxes were all taken. For the first time in his life he had stage fright, he felt petrified by the huge assembly of onlookers. He thought he was going to faint, like a debutante; he thought he would not be able to open his mouth.

Meanwhile his friends in the gallery had seen him, and were applauding and shouting his name. "Sandrino! Sandrino! Bravo, Sandrino! Vannelli! Vannelli!" And the young

ladies in the boxes from kindness or capriciousness granted the hero of the evening the signal honour of applauding at his exit : Bravo ! Bravo !

And Sandrino did not bow. He was not accustomed to applause when he went off.

He shook himself : and opened his mouth. His hour had come.

“Per poco fra le tenebre
Sparì la vostra stella :
Io la farò risorgere,
Più fulgida e più bella”

The high note was just going to emerge, it was already budding in the refrain, it opened its petals, and flowered, while its stem grew smoothly without wavering. Sandrino had done it. He had done his special number. It was the others' turn now : now the public could clap their hands, and the managers send him the shoes on a tray, and his mother, poor creature, weep alone in her box.

(From “I Pesci fuor d'acqua.” Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

THE OLD-FASHIONED GENTLEMAN

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

WHEN Donna Ermanzia Carafa gave her hand to Giannetto Ivaldi to kiss, she thought : “Here is the man for my daughter !” and at once she looked instinctively at her daughter, who returned his bow with a perfunctory greeting.

It was as if Giannetto Ivaldi did not please her ; and this distressed Donna Ermanzia Carafa, because she was very much taken with this chivalrous man of forty-five years, who preferred to amuse himself in the society of old ladies, to whom he showed the civilities of a bygone time, and a by gone courtesy.

Tall, thin, still fair-haired, he showed in his gestures and carriage that inimitable sense of modesty and dignity which is a sure sign of nobility of race ; the very clothes he wore,

rather old-fashioned in cut, but perfect in line, gave to his upright figure that sober elegance, which—according to the not unwise judgment of Donna Carafa—is lacking to-day in a nobility given to an excessive love of sport.

And so, almost every evening he was welcomed to visit his old friend, who offered him the rosolio of Portugal, a sweet and harmless liqueur which she always made herself.

“Mamma ! Mamma !” said Lucilla, when he had taken his leave, “don’t you see that Ivaldi is courting you ? Don’t you see how religiously he drinks your rosolio of Portugal ? None of our friends have ever wished to taste the rosolio of Portugal !”

Donna Ermanzia smiled with a certain blissfulness, and abstractedly caressed her daughter’s pale face, as if to show her that it was she who was now the flatterer. Then she sighed, and said that she was sixty years old, that she was stout, that she was ill.

“You hear my breathing, my daughter ? Why, these are my usual pains, you know, the pains that I have had ever since that terrible endocarditis. Endocarditis : that is what is called, is it not ?”

Lucilla did not answer ; she neither sighed nor stretched out her hand.

The noble lady really suffered in consequence of certain articular pains with which she had been left many years before, as a result of endocarditis, and her confidential physician, spurning the famous rosolio, never failed to explain the matter to her in more or less scientific language : “The valves of the heart no longer suffice, the blood circulates with less pressure, the heart is enlarged because there is greater fatigue.”

When the heart swelled because of the greater fatigue, Donna Ermanzia had long crises of weakness ; she could hardly breathe, she remained motionless on her bed, propped up on the pillows, with the veins of her neck swollen, monstrous. She would wait painfully for the moment when she could utter her lamentations. Then she would lament :

"Soon I shall no longer be able to climb the stairs. Soon you will have to be very careful before telling me any news, good or ill. And in the end, I shall die, just when we are not prepared, neither you nor I. Do you know what happens to the heart, Lucilla? It breaks. . . . And when it has broken, will not everything be over?"

But the old lady had long periods of tranquillity. Then her heart suffered for very different reasons. She would smile at her daughter with anxious sadness, without speaking, and would content herself with taking her hand from time to time—it was rather a cold hand—so that she might press it against her heart.

"How is it beating?"

"Like mine, Mamma," replied Lucilla calmly.

"Oh, yours!" murmured her mother enigmatically, looking in another direction.

She suffered in silence on account of Lucilla, who was twenty-nine years old, and who was not of a docile and amiable disposition. It is true that there were signs of breeding in that beautiful long pale face. The folds of the lips were incisive, the forehead fine and high, the glance direct, the ears very small, the nose large and aquiline; but Donna Ermanzia would have liked these undoubted indications of nobility to be endued with that sense of sweetness which illuminates a feminine face, and gives it the charm of smiles, and clarity of thought and expression. To speak of Lucilla's heart was, to Donna Ermanzia, like speaking of her own heart. The latter was diseased and must break before long; the former was a closed casket, of which no one had ever known the secret; perhaps not even Lucilla herself. Was the casket empty? Lucilla looked as if she would say that it was empty. She smiled at the idea of love, she let it be understood that she was a strong woman, that men had become aware of her strength, and had not come near her that they might not have to measure themselves against her; she laughed at the advice, the fears and distresses of her mother, as we laugh at an obstacle to overcome which is not worth the sacrifice of our pride.

"And when I am no more, my daughter? Do you wish to remain alone? Is it possible that you are to remain alone, that you are not to have at your side a man who appreciates you, a man who is worthy of you? Mind, Lucilla, I don't in the least mean a young man, a frivolous boy, one of those whose thoughts run on horses, cars and football. A man, a real man, a man of a certain age. . . ."

Donna Ermanzia was thinking of Giannetto Ivaldi. But Lucilla's face clouded. That expression : *a man of a certain age*, which her mother had used as if intentionally, wounded her pride in an unexpected fashion ; it exasperated her, and perhaps pained her as well. Her heart was not an empty casket !

But Donna Ermanzia continued naïvely :

"You also are no longer a child. A frivolous boy would not suit you either. Nor would a man suit you who lacked that distinction. . . . let us even say, those aristocratic qualities which make us feel such strangers in the company of wealthy merchants and *nouveaux-riches*. But if you come to look at it, my daughter, our class is also going through a crisis. You know what I think nowadays of the heirs of the most illustrious families. Look about you, and you will see nothing but gentlemen in goggles, horn in hand, getting into carriages without horses, and impelling the horseless carriages through the dust. Ah ! I should like a real gentleman for you, of serious character, reserved, obliging, of a certain age. . . ."

"Giannetto Ivaldi, Mamma?"

It almost seemed as if Donna Ermanzia had made Lucilla decide to accept the exceedingly polite Giannetto as her fiancé, for the sake of pleasing her. As she considered him ecstasically, she could not but recognise that, although still young, he was the last specimen to be seen nowadays of a most exclusive and somewhat autocratic society, whose record, at a certain epoch, had not been strictly patriotic.

She called him :

"Giannetto !"

Giannetto was standing in front of her, deferential, attentive

to her wishes, ready with a few words of flattery or a quiet smile.

"Giannetto, pray give me that book . . . Pray tell me your opinion of little Marchioness Varzotti . . . Do ask Lucilla to show you her collection of lace . . . Pray accept a little glass of rosolio of Portugal."

He bowed invariably. He bowed to the noble lady, he bowed to Lucilla. Lucilla hardly looked at him, but later she signed to him to sit beside her, and this signal was anxiously awaited by Donna Ermanzia, who was the first to see it and rejoice at it. "There ! what a fine couple ! How well they look together ! How well her dark head looks in contrast to his fair one ! And how young they still seem ! Giannetto does not look more than thirty-six or thirty-seven. What a distinguished figure ! And she also, how dignified she is, how fine she is with her reserved manner ! She is a Carafa ! An Ivaldi and a Carafa ! What splendid names !" For some time she pressed her hand against her heart, which was beating too hard, her poor diseased heart which would have to stop before long.

Lucilla had consented in silence, with dignity. She knew that Giannetto made no claims upon her, not even for the slight crumbs of affection that may be scattered in words, in monosyllables ; she knew that out of chivalry he would not render her too ridiculous, and that he would be as discreet and courteous with his fiancée as with Donna Ermanzia. She was convinced that he did not love her, that he was marrying her to please her mother, out of chivalry ; and also it seemed to her that Giannetto felt too lonely, and that it suited him to marry the daughter, neither old nor plain, of a noble lady like Donna Ermanzia Carafa. "Yes, yes," thought Lucilla, when she was with her fiancé, "he also attaches much importance to rank. He wants to connect himself with the Carafas, who are related to the Carafas of Arco. He wants to feel on a better footing in the drawing-room of Donna Maria Annunziata. Fool !" And when she was alone and could banish from her mind the image of this man who was so

dull in his dry politeness, she would wring her hands desperately, and looking at her pale reflection she would ask of her mirror something other than her own face, just as she asked of life something that might resemble a desire fulfilled, or partly fulfilled.

She spent long hours in her room, or in a loggia full of flowers, from which one could descend by a small staircase to the dismal garden. Her room, the loggia, the dismal garden ! her life was enclosed by these walls of brick and hedges of myrtle. They had all believed that she could fade like this, between those walls and those myrtles, without seeing anything of life, determined not to ask for anything more, not to bow her head, to sustain herself with the pride of the Carafas, out of contempt for others, for the merchants and the new-rich ; they all believed her to be such as she had shown herself to those who did not understand her, to her mother and Giannetto Ivaldi : a strong woman, a haughty woman, a closed and empty heart.

No, on the contrary, the room and the loggia knew that she had reached the threshold of the thirties suffering, crying out for someone unknown who might come to free her from her loneliness, from the tragedy of her youth, crying out for a man, whosoever he might be, who might carry her far away. And in her anguish she had given this man various shapes, including those of the men she saw as they passed down the street, giving her an indifferent glance.

From the time that she became engaged to Giannetto Ivaldi she suffered still more. During the few hours in which she showed herself to him and to her mother, she appeared to them calm and cold. But this calm and this coldness put a seal to long hours of burning torment, which had not succeeded in breaking her spirit, and it was the preparation for more feverish hours of sleeplessness and tears.

The months went by. Suddenly Donna Ermanzia had one of her most terrible crises of weakness and prostration. Giannetto believed the end to be close at hand, but he showed no sign of discomposure, as though he feared to appear incorrect.

The old lady always remained immovable on her bed, propped on the pillows, unable to breathe, the veins in her neck monstrous, her lips blue, her pulse weak, and her poor heart beating fast and feebly. "I am craving for air," her poor eyes seemed to say, large with anxiety and continual pain, and they turned by preference to the gallant gentleman who stood in front of her, still deferential and attentive to her wishes and smiles.

Giannetto was always at the noble lady's beck and call.

And then came some relief from her pain. Tears came to her eyes—tears of joy. The cough abated, the pain on the left side of her chest was alleviated, and at last the feeling of cold and stiffness disappeared from the inert limbs. Was it not all due to him, to Giannetto? The sick woman looked tenderly at Lucilla, and thanked her : she thanked her, not for her assistance, but for allowing her to have Giannetto there, near her bed, vigilant and chivalrous during her hours of danger as he had ever been.

After three weeks of bed and a milk diet Donna Ermanzia recovered, but she could no longer climb the stairs, or walk, or talk for long at a time. When she got up for the first time, and returned to her chair in the little study, she seemed to be nothing but a great inert parasitical body, one of those bodies which make us wonder why they should persevere in existing without life. Her large sallow flaccid face, furrowed with deep wrinkles like horrible brown marks, was heavily sunk on the back of the armchair ; her great dull eyes gazed almost with stupor at the objects in the room, and especially at the clock of Saxony china on the chimney piece, in front of the mirror, between the two candelabra—she listened with pleasure to the sound of the pendulum, regular and light—or else her eyes fixed on a statuette of jasper of Volterra, which Giannetto Ivaldi had praised to her as a work of great value. All at once her whole face was illuminated by a slow smile ; her knight was awaiting her orders.

"Oh, Giannetto ! . . . Pray give me that little stool . . . Pray read me the latest news in the *Conservatore* . . . Pray

give me your opinion of Lucilla's new gown . . . Pray accept a little glass of rosolio of Portugal."

He always complied, and the excellent dame forgot her diseased heart, was in ecstasies, and said to herself, closing her eyes :

"Oh, Lucilla ! Lucilla ! how happy you will be !"

This old lady, who was more interested in her cavalier than in her own daughter, did not notice that Lucilla's eyes were more beautiful, sweeter, more humble, that Lucilla herself was kinder, almost timorous and tender. But Giannetto, always affable, chivalrous and deferential, saw and pondered. What had he thought of his fiancée ? What was he thinking of her ? What were his feelings towards her ? How far had he satisfied the desire of his good old friend ? What affection did he believe Lucilla to have for him ? He never asked for anything for himself. He seemed only anxious to appear correct in his behaviour towards the two ladies, but he took in and weighed much more than the ladies thought, very much more than Lucilla—at this time—believed.

Being suspicious, he enveloped her, he surrounded her with his unspoken questions, to which he expected no answer. When, in the evening, he took leave of the two ladies, he would wander about round their house, for hours at a time, till the night was far advanced ; he would enter the half-dark alley on to which looked the wall of the old garden, and he would reconnoitre the ivy-covered wall, and a small concealed iron gate. Ah ! that gate, that dark gap ! Might it not have been opened, among the stones and the leaves, in order to betray him ?

One evening, as he was watching this concealed gate in the half-dark valley, he discerned the rustling of feet and a murmur of voices.

Then, unseen, he saw. And then, unseen, he followed an unknown man for some distance along the street.

* * *

Donna Ermanzia was surprised when her maid told her that Lucilla and Giannetto had stopped to talk together,

looking at each other, in the recess of a window. It was the first time, since he had come to the Carafa's house, that Giannetto had committed an impropriety. But the old lady smiled indulgently. "Ah, at last ! they love one another !" she thought to herself, and she wanted to see them unobserved—that engaged pair who were talking together, looking at each other, in the recess of a window. Giannetto had asked Lucilla very ceremoniously to grant him an interview. Lucilla had made a slight inclination of her head, approaching this very window. Now she listened, extremely pale.

He spoke : and as usual his gestures were controlled, and his voice was calm and cold and monotonous. It was with this voice, with these gestures, that he accused her. There was not a pretence of rancour, or of love, in his clear eyes, which shone at times like a grey sky, without revealing thoughts, intentions or threats. It was as though he were describing to her, without passion or concern, the particulars of a ball at the Orenegos' or the d'Antinos', or else as though he were speaking indifferently about himself, of some other life of his, rather remote, rather dull, rather out of the world.

Lucilla, very pale, listened without blinking an eyelid. When he had finished, and a frigid silence had fallen between them—that icy and oppressive silence in which time seems to measure meticulously the moments of distress—her lips trembled, but they barely trembled. Too proud to search hastily for a lie, Lucilla Carafa lowered her eyes and appeared weak and overcome. Then she raised her head, and looked into her fiancé's clear calm eyes, which expressed nothing, which neither condemned nor suffered. She only said, firmly : "It is true."

Giannetto did not move.

"What do you propose to do ?" he asked, after a pause.

"That is for you to decide."

"Thank you. As a matter of fact, I have decided."

She gave a start. Her lips trembled again—very slightly. Unconsciously, she leant towards him—very slightly—as if better to hear that voice and scrutinise those eyes.

"What have you decided, Giannetto?"

"I have thought a great deal about your mother, who is a noble lady of the most exalted sentiments. Besides, she is ill, she has one of those illnesses which may be rendered extremely dangerous even by a trifle. (Forgive me if I am obliged to be cruel to you.) It is necessary that she should not know anything, that she should not suspect anything, that she should always believe in you and in me. Therefore it is necessary to sacrifice ourselves. Are you willing?"

Once more she inclined her head without speaking.

"I shall continue to come here every day, and every evening. I shall pay my respects to your mother. Then I shall come and sit beside you. We shall sit side by side every evening, for half-an-hour or an hour, without speaking to each other. We have nothing to say to one another, have we? But we shall sit together so that your mother may see us."

He stopped speaking. She raised her head.

"Are you willing?" he asked.

"Yes."

"That is what I have decided."

She showed some sign of wanting to speak—a little instinctive gesture which she checked half-way, and which revealed in her, for the first time—timidity, uncertainty.

"Well? well?"

"You have decided, Giannetto? No, you have not decided everything. And afterwards, what then?"

"Afterwards? Let us wait. Everything depends on your mother's illness."

"I understand," said Lucilla in her usual voice. "Thank you."

"We are agreed?"

"We are agreed. Thank you."

They left the window: they separated, and parted. And nothing changed at the Carafas'. Donna Ermanzia's health improved. She was able to keep her heart at bay, and could feel it calm in the calm of her life. She was able to walk in the garden on Giannetto's arm, delighting in the amiability of

that gallant gentleman, and enjoying with half-closed eyes the warmth of the sunny air.

The spring was delicious. The sunlight, mild and soft and slightly veiled, enveloped the lonely afternoons in the little city, glittering on the iridescent fragments of glass on the tops of the garden walls, brightening the white doorsteps, and the old porticoes, full of the scent of pear-blossom. The young tender grass sparkled in the little squares and in the valleys, and the old house of the Carafas smiled with its windows, whose little balconies were green with moss in the interstices of the stones. Some afternoons the sun was obscured, and then the air became closer, and one breathed with difficulty, and one had a desire for something new, a far-away feeling of longing, and the women did not know the reason for this longing and were surprised ; but then down came the first rain through gleams of sunlight, and the scent of everything, of the water, and of the saturated earth, remained hanging upon the air until the evening.

The old lady wished to begin to go out driving in her carriage, so that she might breathe to the full the atmosphere of spring. Then she became intrepid : she went on foot to visit Donna Maria Annunziata Carafa d'Arco. And to Donna Maria Annunziata she could talk of nothing but of Giannetto Ivaldi and Lucilla, and was pleased to feel that in the matter of this marriage she had the approval of such a particular lady as her cousin.

Giannetto's assiduity touched her, and pleased her vanity. She would wait for him in the evening with a beating heart, as though she were awaiting a lover, looking at the clock, anticipating his footstep, leaping up at the sound of his voice as he greeted Costanza in the hall. Then she would wish to have him waiting on her, to receive his praise and his homage, and when she responded benevolently to his ceremonious smiles, she had to press her poor heart hard, or it would almost have broken for joy.

"Oh, Giannetto ! Pray be so good as to give me that hand-mirror . . . Ask Lucilla to show you her photograph album.

... Pray read me the latest news in the *Conservatore* ...
Accept a glass of rosolio of Portugal, I pray you."

Lucilla looked at her mother without saying anything, she was incapable of smile or gesture. Silent and spiritless, she waited for the silent, spiritless man to come and sit beside her. She did not appear to suffer. She hardly seemed to see the things around her, or the light casting her shadow on the walls which enclosed these lives in the inexorable circle of habit and convention. She hardly seemed to see Giannetto, she only felt his presence near her, his icy breath fanning her cheek. She felt him watching over her complacently, saying to her: "Here! You must remain here, near me!" She did not move, nor did he. He remained at his post, ready to obey the wishes of Donna Ermanzia, impassive, correct, silent as the grave.

Donna Ermanzia looked at the couple from time to time, and said to herself, pressing her heart:

"They love one another!"

At last, one evening, Giannetto inclined his head elegantly towards his fiancée, and called her by name, hardly moving his lips:

"I have something to say to you."

"Yes, Giannetto."

"I—I am obliged to go away. You need not know why I am going. I have not yet thought what excuse I can make to your mother. But it is certain that I am going, and that I shall be away for some time. I think it will be better for you too."

She blinked, and did not answer.

"I don't yet know where I am going. But it doesn't matter. The important thing is that I should write to you, isn't it? that I should write to you nearly every day. Well, I shall do so. Perhaps your mother will hand you my letters, and will be pleased. Is that all right?"

"That is all right."

"It doesn't matter whether you read my letters, of course. I shall send them to you merely so that your mother may see your name on the envelope in my handwriting . . ."

A gleam of pride came into her eyes, which had been veiled with emotion.

"Very well, I won't open your letters," she said.
And Giannetto Ivaldi said no more.

* * *

How many nights had passed since the iron gate of the garden looking into the half-dark alley was last opened? For how many nights had she forced herself not to give way to false hopes, or to self-torture? What did she think of herself? Was her expiation complete; or had she merely sacrificed herself? Had she taken pity on her mother, or on Giannetto? Was she in dread of others, or of herself? Did she fear pain, or joy?

Lucilla listened apathetically to her mother, who talked of furniture, of the new house, and of wedding presents, and fixed the great day, smiling at the thought of Giannetto in top-hat and frock coat. Later Lucilla went up to her room, shut herself in, opened the drawer of the little bureau, and for some while she gazed, as if for the first time, at the letters which Giannetto Ivaldi had written to her during the last two months. The letters half filled the little drawer. There were a great many of them—already more than fifty. Intact. Lucilla had left them intact; she had not opened one of them. She knew that they could not say anything, that they could not even satisfy a little perverse curiosity. She had thrown them all in there. Every day the little drawer had to engulf one, intact.

This, too, distressed her. She suffered every morning on account of the falsehood involved in this daily letter, which her mother or Costanza would give her with a tender smile, and which was cold to her touch like a small dead thing, for it could not tell her anything, it was simply an address: "To the Lady Lucilla Carafa." And she would think over those sad lonely evenings, during which she and Giannetto had had to pretend to love each other elegantly in front of her mother, and she would again hear his subdued breathing and feel his

vigilant silence, and his image would come back to her, tall, lifeless, spiritless, always ready to be of service.

"Ah !" she cried to herself : "It is better like this, better that he should write these letters to me. If only he would never come back !"

Giannetto Ivaldi did return, however, tired and ill, when the ladies were not expecting him.

He presented himself to them pale and thin, his eyes dim, and a tortured smile on his lips. He seemed to be making violent efforts to smile as usual, to control his trembling limbs, to suffer with dignity, to appear as noble, upright, and deferential as ever in the presence of Donna Carafa, and to be perfectly correct in his manner to his fiancée.

"Giannetto ! Giannetto ! What have you done to yourself, to get so thin ?" exclaimed Donna Carafa, excusing him from his formal greetings.

"Yes, as a matter of fact . . . I am not very well . . . I am in need of a little rest."

"You must take care of yourself, Giannetto, really you must ! Stay in bed to-morrow : I will send my doctor to you."

"Thank you, Donna Ermanzia Dear Donna Ermanzia."

He continued to smile feebly and sadly, as if grateful for this gentle reception and for these kind words. It was as though he had come from a great distance, from a strange country, a land of shadows, having travelled along rough and steep roads, through dust and mud, through high and prickly undergrowth, footsore and weary so that his knees gave way beneath him. It was as though he had passed unnoticed, like a beggar, through brilliant throngs of men and women, in many cities of luxury and pleasure, and how his heart was full of disgust at these vanities of human nature. It was as though he had suffered, to no purpose, many lesser perplexities and vexations, and could now bitterly avouch the uselessness of his journey, and of his suffering.

But now, perhaps, the thought of being back in the friendly drawing-room, in the company of the two ladies, amongst

the familiar objects for which he had almost an affection—the mirror above the chimney piece, the candelabra, the Saxony clock, the statuette of Volterra jasper—filled him with joy and pride, and gave him the strength to say to himself, “Well, you see, I am already better—I am much better—I am well again”—and at the same time to bow to his smiling and indulgent old friend.

The bow was a profound one. Donna Ermanzia would have liked to say : “Pray accept a little glass of rosolio of Portugal”—but she pitied Giannetto, and she did not dare.

“You must advise your fiancé, Lucilla.”

“Yes, *amico mio*, Mamma is quite right.”

“Rest, complete rest ! to begin from this evening.”

“Do go and rest, Giannetto !”

He bowed, and went out.

And never again did he see the drawing-room, where the light of the lamp used to envelop those poor hearts in a fictitious warmth, an illusion of love, and never again did he bow—out of gallantry, out of gratitude—to Donna Ermanzia Carafa.

He died. He died without leaving a word for his fiancée, without leaving her one written line.

When the silence returned,—the infinite silence, which allows us to realise that a life has ceased to be,—Lucilla was filled with a conviction that Giannetto Ivaldi had left a written message for her. And she shut herself up in her room, and feverishly opened the letters which lay intact in the drawer of the little bureau.

No. This old-fashioned gentleman, who might have loved, had not revealed himself. His letters did not say anything. They were blank, they were all blank.

(From “Una Settimana in Paradiso.” Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)

(III)

AN EVENING OF LIES

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

IT is a Spring evening ; probably an evening in May. A few voices are heard in the street, the imprisoned crickets are chattering, and there is a scent of flowers. There is still a glimmer of daylight in the room, but it is waning ; soon one will not be able to see. Indeed, the room itself can hardly be seen as it is. It may be a pleasant little modern sitting-room, with fine new furniture ; there are doors, but still more important, a window with a balcony full of flowers, which looks on to the road.

Maria—the lively young Maria—is on the balcony of flowers. She is tending the flowers abstractedly, and she has just put down a tiny green watering-can. Then she raises her head, smiles, and answers a greeting, a smile and a question, which come from a window opposite.

There are windows opposite, of course.

* * *

“Oh, it’s you. . . . Good evening. . . . Good evening : isn’t that enough for you ? . . . Yes, I am alone. . . . Doli is in the kitchen. . . . He may be eating his supper. . . . No, he isn’t eating it yet, because they haven’t brought it for me to taste. . . . Yes, what a fine thing for you ! . . . You never have anything to-do ! . . . I ? I am busy all day long. . . . What are you laughing at ? . . . What about Doli ? . . . Excuse me, Doli wants me. . . . What ? . . . Don’t you think that Doli gives me anything to do—a baby of eighteen months ? . . . eighteen months and twenty days. . . . There, don’t talk nonsense. . . . I will close the window if you . . .”

She lowers her voice.

"Why is that woman on the second floor watching us? Did you see? I had better shut the window. . . . What time is it? . . . Oh! so I am not allowed to know what time it is! Thank you! Do you suppose that we have no clock here? . . . Yes, that would be all right, that would be a good time. . . . Do you see how my red geranium is flowering?"

She lowers her voice still more.

"That woman on the second floor? . . . Has she gone? . . . Well, what do I care? No! I say, no! . . . I have been with you all day. . . . You are never content! . . . There! Good evening: good-night."

She is about to withdraw, but still hesitates, smiling, when a bunch of carnations, violently thrown from the window opposite, flies through the balcony, and falls in the middle of the room, near a leg of the table. Maria instinctively takes a couple of steps backwards, and makes a protesting gesture with her hand: it is a timorous and feminine gesture. She stands like this, uncertain and confused, a pace or two further back. Then she cautiously re-approaches the iron railing, and speaks in a low voice, almost a whisper—but emphasising the syllables:

"No, no, you must not! . . . Do you understand?"

But she gives a startled jump: inside the room the telephone bell has rung. It is still ringing.

"Do you understand?"

Once more a childish gesture, to make it clear that such things simply are not done; another gesture to show that someone wants her, and that she does not know who it may be. She gives a farewell smile. The telephone bell is still calling her. She closes the windows resolutely, but she does not quite shut them; she only draws them together. She runs to the telephone, a little breathlessly. Her voice is calm, it is no longer her own voice.

"Yes, hello! . . . hello! Yes, it is I, Maria. . . . Oh, it is you, Viotti? . . . Yes, very well thank you, we are all well, including Doli. . . . No, Silvio isn't here. . . . I said:

Silvio isn't here. . . . Well, you can tell me ! . . . You can't ring up later ? . . . All right Viotti, I will tell him. . . . Do you think me so feather-brained ? . . . Oh you know you hurt my feelings ! . . . All right, he is to look in on you before he goes to the office to-morrow. . . . No, I don't need a knot in my handkerchief ! . . . Good-night, Viotti. . . . Yes, thank you. . . . Good-night. . . . Yes, all right, good-night."

She leaves the telephone, takes a few steps about the room, as if hesitating, looking almost fearfully towards the balcony. It is getting too dark to see : but there is a wavering ray of light from the balcony ; one does not know whether it comes from a street lamp or from the house opposite.

* * *

Enter Gigetta, Doli's victim, carrying Doli's bowl of bread and milk. She is a little girl of sixteen, who has been wearing her white apron for a fortnight ; and it must be admitted that her hair has not been combed for a fortnight either.

Gigetta : "Signora."

Maria : "Oh, it's you ! Gigetta ?"

Gigetta : "How dark it is, Signora !"

Maria : "Turn on the light, Gigetta."

Gigetta : "Signora, I have the supper for the baby."

Maria : "Oh, yes ! of course, it is true that you have not yet learnt to press an electric button. Who knows whether it may not be dangerous !"

She goes towards the table ; and presses the button of the hanging bulb. The room is inundated with light. Gigetta gives a start, and says "Good evening" humbly.

Gigetta : "Good evening."

Maria : "What have you got there ? Ah ! the supper for Doli !"

She barely tastes it ; her lips hardly touch the silver spoon.

Gigetta : "Is it good, Signora ?"

Maria : "I don't know."

Gigetta : "Isn't it good ?"

Maria : "Yes, it is good."

Gigetta : "The baby does love it so. I enjoy giving it to him."

Maria : "All right, if it amuses you. I wanted to give it to him myself this evening, but you may, if you enjoy it."

Gigetta : "Thank you, Signora."

Maria : "Tell Michelina that the potatoes ought to be better peeled. Michelina doesn't know how to peel potatoes."

Gigetta : "Very well, Signora."

Maria : "What's the time?"

Gigetta : "I don't know, Signora, I can't read the clock."

Maria : "Lucky for you ! Go, go, the supper has got cold enough already. I will come and watch you later."

Gigetta returns to the kitchen with the steaming saucer. As she goes off, Maria looks after her with a feeling almost of envy. She would like to follow her ; she takes a few steps, then stops. She gives a kind of smile, and then stands quite still, listening. Perhaps she has heard a little cry from Doli in the kitchen ; a little cry of delight, for Doli likes "Nanny" Gigetta's supper, especially at this time of day. Perhaps Maria is smiling at some thought of her own ; she looks about her as though she wished to become more familiar with this room—a small dining-room, still very new, in which the furniture and all the other things are aware that there are three people here ; husband, wife and child ; Silvio, Maria and Doli. Perhaps the furniture and the other things know that it is Spring, that this, to be precise, is a Spring evening, and that there are red geraniums on the little balcony.

Maria is no longer smiling.

She is not smiling, she has a far-away expression. There is something which prevents her from giving her Doli his supper—from playing with her Doli in the kitchen—and she does not know what it is. There are so many things that she does not know ! She takes some steps towards the table, and opens a book ; she would like to sit down and read, or else she could go on with that lace for Doli's little collar. It is so easy to do ! No. There are so many things that she might do ; for it is

pleasant at this hour, in this light, and solitude among these things is very peaceful. No, no. She brushes her hair off her forehead, with an indifferent, rather melancholy, gesture, but it may be an habitual gesture, who knows? She puts one hand on the back of a chair, and stands there waiting. She herself does not know for what she is waiting. Is it for Silvio?

* * *

This is Silvio's voice in the hall. It may be the voice of a well-loved man; a well-loved voice, which, however, seems almost unfamiliar at times, especially when it comes from another room. Maria is glad, though she does not smile; she runs to meet her husband, who is standing in the doorway, smiling at her.

Maria: "Oh, Silvio!"

Silvio: "Am I late?"

Maria shrugs her shoulders.

Silvio: "Where's Doli?"

Maria: "In the kitchen."

Silvio: "Poor Doli, in the kitchen?"

Maria: "But don't you know that he loves to be in the kitchen? He is having his supper, poor little fellow; Gigetta is giving it to him, and Michelina is adoring him!"

Silvio: "And what about you?"

Maria: "I devoured him, up till half an hour ago; devoured him with kisses, you know. Now there has been enough of that, he must have something to eat himself."

Silvio: "You are a darling, Maria. You look pale."

Maria: "Pale?"

Silvio: "Yes, pale."

He puts a dainty little packet on the table, and looks at Maria gravely; he smiles at her again. Then he goes out to the kitchen, without saying a word. Maria does not follow him; she seems to be drawn towards that dainty little packet, which he has put on the table; she opens it, slowly untying the knot of thin gold cord. It is a little box of chocolates.

Silvio returns, smiling.

Maria : "Oh, Silvio, chocolates !"

Silvio : "Are you pleased ?"

She is sitting in a small armchair, with her legs crossed. Her back is turned to him.

Silvio : "Little one ! I love you so much ; I love both you and our Doli so very much. You are my whole life. I should like to be rich, and stay with you all day long. Do you know what the office is like, Maria ? No, you don't know, and you could not know. Superiors, inferiors, ledgers and figures ; but it is not that alone. It is not only the weariness and vexation, toil and disgust ; it is also the home-sickness, the longing for you. I told you that I had taken some photographs of you both to the office ? I put them on my desk ; I look at you while I work. I know some of them laughed about it. What does it matter ? Those who laugh do not understand, do not love, have no beautiful baby, and no dear companion like you. Don't you think I am right, Maria ?"

Maria nods her little head.

Silvio bending down over her to stroke her forehead. "Why are you so pale ?"

Maria : "I don't know. Perhaps it is all this light."

Silvio : "Did you light up early ?"

Maria : "No, you know that I prefer not to turn on the light until it is really too dark to see."

Silvio : "Were you on the balcony ?"

Maria : "Yes, I was on the balcony."

Silvio : "And your flowers ?"

Maria, smiling : "They are asleep now."

Silvio : "You look so pretty from below when you are on the balcony ; just as if you were in a basket of flowers."

Maria, after a pause. "There was something I had to tell you, but now I can't remember what it was. What on earth could it have been ? Perhaps it was something tiresome. It is just as well."

Silvio : "You are rather scatter-brained."

Maria : "Now you are beginning to treat me like a child !"

Silvio, sitting down. "Here Mariolina ! Come here at once !"

Maria : "Where ? On your knee ? No ! no !"

Silvio seizes her by force, and obliges her to sit on his knee. "You see, you are really quite willing to sit here !"

Maria : "Presumptuous man !"

Silvio : "And also, you want me to give you a kiss. But I am not going to do so !"

Maria : "Patience, then."

Silvio caresses her, but does not kiss her.

Maria : "Patience !" (noticing his silence) "Do you see how nervous you are ? It is the office, isn't it ? It is the office that tires you so. Or else, it is my fault. I have done something that you do not like. Perhaps we are too far away from each other."

Silvio : "Yes, dear, we are too far away from each other. To-day I should have been free. What did you do to-day ?"

Maria : "I ? Nothing, dear."

Silvio : "What ! Didn't you go out ?"

Maria : "I ? No."

Silvio : "Maria !"

A short pause. An unexpected sense of anguish in both their hearts.

Maria : "No, no, I have been here all day. Do you want to know what I have been doing ? I wrote a letter to my mother, saying all sorts of nice things about you and Doli. Such a long letter. Then I read, I cooked and I sang. Do you want to know what I read ? There is the book. No, I did not go out. I no longer have any wish to go out."

Silvio, pushing her away. "Maria ! Maria !"

Maria : "Well, what is it ?"

Silvio : "You did not go out to-day ?"

Maria : "No, I say !"

Silvio : "Why are you trembling ?"

Maria : "Am I trembling ?"

Silvio : "Why do you lie like this, for no reason, Maria ? I came here to-day about half-past three. You were not here."

Gigetta and Doli were in the Public Gardens. There was only Michelina. I came back at half-past four, and at five. You were not here. There was no longer even Michelina, there was no one. I went out again without giving it a thought. It was quite natural that you should be out. But now, now . . ."

Maria bends her head, shamefaced as a child.

Silvio : "You have told a lie ?"

Maria : "Yes."

Silvio : "Why ?"

Maria : "I don't know, any more than you do."

Silvio : "But you must know !"

He paces rapidly up and down the room. Enter Gigetta from the kitchen. Gigetta smiles at her master.

Gigetta : "Doli has eaten all his supper—two saucers full."

Silvio : "All right, well done !"

Gigetta : "Shall I bring him in here ?"

Silvio : "No, Doli must stay in the kitchen !"

Gigetta : "Oh !"

Silvio : "And you too, in the kitchen, Gigetta."

Gigetta goes off to the kitchen.

Silvio, returning to Maria, says, almost gently : "Where were you to-day ? In the Public Gardens with Doli ! No, you can't say that. Where, then ? It is strange that you should tell an aimless lie like this, and to me, to me ! You must understand, Maria, that a lie told to me is not, and cannot be, the same as a lie told to your mother or father. It is a different thing altogether. Don't you agree ?"

Maria nods her little head.

Silvio : "Where were you to-day ?"

Maria, raising her head, and looking him in the face—rather fearfully : "At . . . at Albertina Mazza's house. She was my school-friend."

Silvio : "Yes, I know. For one thing, we have been together to Albertina Mazza's house."

Maria : "Well, I went there again to-day."

Silvio : "Why didn't you want me to know it ?"

Maria : "No, I didn't want you not to know it."

Silvio : "Then why did you tell that lie?"

Maria : "Just because . . . I don't know."

He lets himself fall limply into a chair. She is still standing, with lowered eyes.

Silvio : "Maria ! Maria ! Can it be possible that you don't understand, Maria ! Why are you standing like that, looking down ? Upon my word, when I look at you, I can hardly believe that you are Doli's mother, that you are my own Maria ! And what then ? What then ? Don't you realise that life itself is different ? that everything is different ? Don't you ?"

A long pause. At last he gets up with a resolute expression.

Silvio : "You were with your friend Albertina Mazza, to-day ?"

Maria : "Yes."

Silvio : "Is it true ?"

Maria : "Yes."

Silvio : "Look at me, Maria. Is it true ?"

Maria : "Yes, yes."

Silvio : "Well then, I shall go to her at once. I shall come back at once, we shall have dinner, and go to bed happy."

* * *

He has gone out hastily, followed by a strange look from her; a look which he does not yet understand.

Then her eyes wander round the room, as though inquiring of it the reason for the slammed door, the unexpected silence, the deadly solitude. And, all at once, she understands, as though the things had answered her. She understands, and involuntarily, she murmurs the name of that friend of hers :
"Albertina . . ."

She understands, and she looks at that thing in the corner of the room ; the thing which can immediately give her Albertina's voice ; the telephone. She picks up the receiver which buzzes in her ear.

"One-six-two-eight ! One-six-two-eight ! Hello ! I said one-six-two-eight. Hello ! . . . Oh ! all right . . . Albertina ? . . . Oh, it is you ! . . . Would you be so kind as to ask

Albertina to come and speak to me at once. . . . Good evening, thank you. . . . Albertina? . . . hello! . . . Is that you, Albertina? . . . Oh, it is you, thank heavens! Just a word, in a hurry. I will explain to you to-morrow. To-day, from three o'clock till half-past five, I was with you, do you understand? . . . My husband is jealous, and wants to re-assure himself, and he is likely, most likely, to come to you at once. . . . This very moment! You will tell him? . . . You understand? . . . Good-bye I must leave you now. . . . Good-night. You are my salvation! . . . Yes, yes, thank you, good-night. . . . Yes, good-night."

Another ring, and she leaves the telephone. She returns to the middle of the room, and stands with bent head, absorbed in her thoughts. Her hand slowly presses her heart, which has stood so firm, and which is now beating so fast. At last she raises her head, and goes towards the door, just as she did before. On the threshold she sees her husband, hat in hand.

Maria : "Silvio !"

Silvio : "Yes, I came back."

Maria : "Why?"

Silvio, still in the doorway : "Ah, do you want to know?"

Maria : "Why?"

Silvio : "In the street I realised that it was unnecessary. As I walked along I felt ridiculous, and I realised that I must have looked ridiculous in your eyes too. To rush off through the streets at this hour of night, when there is the telephone! In my alarm and anger I did not think of the telephone! But you did! you did!"

Maria, trembling all over. "I?"

Silvio : "Yes, you. I hope you are not going to lie this time. I, I myself, heard the telephone bell with my own ears, just now, when I was on the landing. I realised that you had run to it at once, without delay, and that that short ring marked the end of the conversation. . . . I know the telephone bell!" (He comes in at last, throws his hat on a chair, and confronts Maria resolutely, seizing her wrists.) "To whom did you speak? To Albertina? Eh? To Albertina?"

Maria, still trembling : "No, no."

Silvio : "Confess that you telephoned to Albertina !"

Maria : "No, no, no."

Silvio : "To whom then ? To whom ?"

Maria : "Why are you hurting me ? I would not have believed that you were like this. You are hurting me !"

Silvio : "Answer me, Maria. Tell the truth for once. To whom ?"

She is terrified, but is no longer trembling. She avoids Silvio's eyes, which are begging her painfully for the truth, and gazes round the room at all these friendly inanimate things which might suggest to her a possible truth, a half-truth. After a moment her eyes rest once more on the telephone, which stands there in the corner like a casket, in which good and evil words, truths and falsehoods, are mingled together, and the sight of this casket, hanging on the wall, suddenly brings something back to her—a man's voice, as she heard it rumbling in her ears, just before she turned on the light.

Maris is strong. So much so that she releases one hand from his grasp.

Maria : "You don't let me speak ! You don't let me speak ! I have not telephoned to anyone, don't you understand ? It was Viotti who rang up after you had gone out. Your friend Viotti, who says he has some business with you."

Silvio : "Oh ! Viotti . . ."

He has relinquished the other wrist as well, stammering that unexpected name almost as if it were sweet to him. Gradually his face is illumined with a smile of joy, and although it is still drawn with past bitterness and fear, his big clear eyes laugh and laugh, and then fill with tears of credulous happiness.

Maria : "Weren't you expecting Viotti to ring up ?"

Silvio : "Maria !"

Maria : "He asked whether you were at home. I said you were not at home. So he asked me to tell you . . ."

Silvio : "Oh ! what did he ask you to tell me, Maria ?"

Maria, as though exhausted : "To-morrow to-morrow. . . morning . . . about that business, you know . . . before going to the office . . . to go . . . to go to his room."

Silvio : "And what about Albertina ?"

Maria : "Ask her anything you like !"

Silvio : "Maria !"

He seizes her, puts her into the armchair, kneels down in front of her, and drops his head into her lap. Perhaps he is weeping. She strokes his hair.

Maria : "I told you a lie."

Silvio : "Like a child."

Maria : "Just like a child."

Silvio : "Perhaps because you were afraid that I should scold you . . . that I should be jealous of Albertina."

Maria : "Perhaps."

Silvio : "That I should be jealous of Albertina's brother."

Maria : "Oh no, not that !"

Silvio : "No, truly ?"

Maria : "How much we have suffered on account of a lie !"

A long pause. Silvio gets up. He is happy. Maria gets up too. She is happy. They walk about, looking and smiling at each other. They are both happy.

Maria : "Aren't you hungry, Silvio ?"

Silvio : "No . . . Yes, I am hungry."

Maria : "You sent Gigetta away, poor soul."

Silvio : "And Doli ?"

Maria : "Now we will call Doli, too !"

Silvio : "Oh ! Listen ! Let us make a surprise for the servants ?"

Maria : "Yes, we will lay the table !"

Silvio : "We will lay the table !"

Maria : "The table-cloth and the napkins are in the drawer of the sideboard."

Silvio : "But first, Maria. . . Come here, Maria !"

He kisses her forehead.

Maria : "The plates and glasses on the sideboard. And the knives, forks and spoons ?"

They lay the table ; very gaily. It is an excessive gaiety, that is just a little sad. And as they smile at each other from time to time, they persuade themselves that they are giving each other this mutual gaiety. But Silvio, noticing that the tablecloth is too long on his side, looks down, and sees something just below it, on the floor, near the leg of the table. He bends down to see it better, and picks it up.

Silvio : "Maria . . ."

Maria : "Yes."

Silvio : "There are some flowers here, on the floor ; a nose-gay. . . . Did you drop it ?"

Maria gives a start, then runs up to him, concealing a profound and unexpected emotion. "Yes, I dropped it. It is mine."

(From "Una Settimana in Paradiso." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)



GUIDO GOZZANO

(1882-1916)



PAMELA-FILMS

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

MISS OTTEPATI (for many years past malicious tongues in the country round had replaced the O by an A—attempati, old), had a charming name that might have come out of Goldoni ; she was called Pamela.

Pamela ! a dimpled face, a Watteau profile, deep eyes, red lips, a three-cornered smile . . . Alas ! Pamela was sixty, and possessed none of these charms. Time had added nothing to her ugliness. Anyone who remembered her at twenty, remembered her as just the same ; horribly masculine, angular and bony, a trifle hump-backed and lame, with the grotesque profile of some exotic water-bird ; her huge nose blotched with strange protuberances, her mouth cleft from ear to ear, her small green eyes protected by very thick eyebrows running into one, and sticking out like moustaches.

Sometimes nature is perverse. No sight is sadder and more pitiful than that of certain souls condemned to live all their lives in a misshapen body, as if they were criminals in a terrible prison expiating crimes not their own.

Nevertheless Pamela Ottempati had had, at twenty, her ray of sunshine. She had been engaged to a lawyer's clerk. Cruel destiny had snatched away her bridegroom, stricken with pneumonia almost on the eve of their wedding. From that day onward the virgin widow had no more troubled to pluck the hairs out of her chin, or to powder her red and shiny

nose. Time and religious devotions had consoled her for her loss. But later Pamela had suffered a second and perhaps sadder trouble ; a lawsuit with her brother, a brother much younger than she, handsome, temperamentally entirely different from herself, born for fortune, for pleasure, for adventures. The lawsuit had been disastrous for the poor spinster, who saw herself deprived of the greater part of her income, and who remained alone in the old country-house with her dog, her cat, her hens and her maid.

As time passed, she grew more bitter and implacable, gentle only where religion and alms-giving were concerned. For fifteen years she had never seen her brother, but from time to time had news of him indirectly. He had been abroad, in France, in England, he had increased his fortune, lost it all, then grown rich again first as théâtre manager, then as film manufacturer. A tempestuous and lucky existence, disordered and sinful, of whose details Pamela would hear nothing. But for the past three years the old maid had a new cause for anxiety. Her brother was back again in Italy, had settled in Turin and there established a big cinema studio. In three years the studio had prospered amazingly, and ranked among the best film-producing concerns.

Now Pamela was used to seeing her stainless name in the papers along with the most scandalous film-titles. Some of the films from her brother's company were shown at the Vreglio cinema, and then, walking past great posters depicting crimes and embraces, ferocious men and half-naked women, Pamela hung her head, drew her great eyebrows together in a frown, and murmured savagely.

"Shame as well ! Loss, humiliation and shame !"

For three years she had given up her rare visits to the city. She had never seen her brother, and never never forgiven him.

* * *

She did not forgive him even when he died suddenly.

The death of the great business man caused something of a sensation. It was discussed, in the newspapers and much

discussed in the cinema world. In the little country town, people talked of nothing else.

"Only forty-three !"

"Such a fine man !"

"Almost a millionaire !"

"He did enjoy life so !"

"Strong and healthy !"

"Too much blood pressure !"

"Apoplexy !"

"So sudden !"

Death had struck him down in the train between Genoa and Nice while he was allowing himself a few days' rest, a brief rose-coloured holiday with his friend of the moment, the divinely beautiful Diana Carmeli, a film star, the very same that a poet, saved from starvation by the Studio, had called "the Duse of Silence."

Miss Pamela would hear nothing, would know nothing. She was aghast. She did not weep for her brother, but the thought of the horrible death which had closed a still more horrible life gave her no peace. Shuddering, she was certain that his soul was damned.

"Pray, pray for his soul's rest. It will be a great solace to you."

"Pray for his soul's rest ? Why, he died in sin !"

"No one has the right to say that," said the priest, less severe and implacable than his penitent. "No one can know what takes place between a soul and God at the hour of death."

Miss Ottempati would admit of no consolation. She smoothed the false bluish front above her hirsute eyebrows, patted Bob—the decrepit little dog, sighing in a comfortless way and repeating to herself :

"Lost ! Lost, to all eternity !"

* * *

A week after the death, Pamela had a letter from the lawyer Quinteri.

He was an old friend of the family, loyal and very devoted,

who had already helped, though not with conspicuous success, in the affair, many years ago, with her brother. The lawyer, after a few words of condolence, took the liberty—in view of their confidential relationship and old friendship—of asking her whether she was thinking of taking steps with regard to the legal formalities, and of offering her once more, should she need them, his services and advice in the difficult circumstances.

“What difficult circumstances?”

“The inheritance, miss,” the old servant commented. “You are the sole heir. You see, I was right.”

Heiress to that wretched man . . . Pamela could not sleep all night, and at dawn arose more in a panic than ever.

“I am going. It is absolutely necessary for me to see the lawyer and to consult him at once. Give me my things.”

Standing in front of the great dim mirror, Pamela put on her city garments. A bodice trimmed with lace and beads, a very full skirt—she had never given up, in spite of the passing of years and changes of fashion, her three starched petticoats and stiff corset.

She threw across her shoulders a cape of cardinal red in the the cut of 1890, crowned her stringy false hair with a light hat on which trembled three squalid peacock’s feathers held by a parrot’s head.

“You will have to think of mourning, miss.”

“I will see about it when I am in town. I expect I shall have to stay several days. Who knows what news may be waiting for me.”

“Delightful news. I only wish I were in your shoes.”

“But what anxieties too.”

“You are perfectly safe with lawyer Quintin.”

Pamela Ottempati put his best collar and chain on Bob and went off sighing.

“God help me!”

* * *

Pamela never knew why she attracted so much attention in the streets of the town.

"All that curiosity just for one more stranger. They are worse gossips in the city than in the provinces," she murmured fiercely, glaring at the urchins, the young men, the ladies, who stopped and turned round as she went by. "After all, I am not a monster, and I don't dress like those shameless creatures . . ."

To get away from this strain of inexplicable admiration, she hailed a cab. While she was waiting in his office for lawyer Quinteri, she inhaled the notarial atmosphere with delight. The odour of corroded ink, the stale stench of stamped paper, carried her back to the time when she was twenty, to her hopes, to her dead lover. Alas ! She had before her the pot-bellied lawyer Quinteri, who talked in a solemn tone, his eyes on the ceiling, the tips of five fingers placed against the tips of the other five.

"You must certainly not worry. You have four months in which to put in your claim to the inheritance, and to make the necessary legal attestations to admit you into quiet possession of the estate which your unfortunate brother left behind him when he died. Fate is giving back to you with interest the fortune which she had taken from you."

"That is all very well, but where is all the money?"

"Liquid assets are few. They may amount to forty thousand. Almost all the capital, about eight hundred thousand lire, is invested in the factory."

"Then liquidate at once."

"Liquidate ! It would be sheer lunacy ! You would not realise a fifth of what it is worth."

"Find a buyer. I am not going to be the owner of a place of sin."

"A place of sin . . . my dear lady, you are mistaken. The Ottempati-Films have the reputation for being a moral and artistic force among other producing concerns of their kind. Do think it over. Meanwhile, may I suggest a visit?"

"Will you come too?"

"I will. You are staying, I think, at the Hotel Concordia, which is just next door to the factory. Shall we meet to-

morrow at half past nine, in front of the Studio? Will that suit you?"

* * *

At nine o'clock on the following morning Miss Ottempati was already striding with great steps up and down the piazza in front of the open gate, twirling in one hand her massive umbrella, and with the other holding Bob by the chain.

She hazarded a glance round the immense courtyard. Various things aroused her curiosity, a cage of monkeys, a great rose tree in flower, two page boys resting and playing with a greyhound. She advanced timidly, visited the imprisoned creatures, smelt a rose without picking it, caressed a boy, who ran away laughing. When she turned to go out, the gate was blocked by a row of cars out of which stepped a troupe of Napoleonic soldiers. They seemed to turn to her, greeting her from afar.

"Tulipier!"

"Hullo! Tulipier!"

"Bravo, Tulipier!"

They were laughing and shouting at her. Were they talking about her? Terrified, she took refuge in a little door, followed a dark passage, emerging into a bright lit corridor to flee through the other door. But the other door was shut. She retraced her steps, passed between two eighteenth century stage decorations, lost herself.

"Tulipier, listen . . ."

The voices re-echoed, following her as she went. She fled, almost at a run, threaded other corridors, came out in a huge glass building divided into little theatres with wings, crowded and as complicated as a maze. Some Roman soldiers barred her way. Again she fled, then found herself in a ball-room among ladies and gentlemen in evening dress. A photographer pushed her violently. "Now then, Tulipier, out of the way. You are spoiling my scene, you rotter."

Pamela dashed away to the left, among a group of fakirs and dancing girls. Every way of escape was closed, she felt lost, then set her back against an altar of Vishnu, turning to

bay, with one hand tightly holding Bob who barked furiously, and with the other brandishing the heavy umbrella. A fit of trembling shook her hairy chin, and agitated her huge eyebrows, and the little hat with its three squalid feathers.

Soldiers of Julius Cæsar, soldiers of Napoleon, Brahmins, closed round her in a circle, acclaiming her.

"It is Tulipier himself. What an artist."

"How he can disguise himself."

"No one would take it for a disguise."

"He looks like a real witch."

"Bravo, Tulipier. Three cheers for Tulipier."

And a Brahmin priest, more enthusiastic even than the others, caught her by the knees, and lifted her high up above the shouting crowd. Pamela gave one shriek, and fainted in the arms of the lawyer Quinteri, who at that moment arrived on the scene.

"Wretches. What have you done? This lady is Miss Ottempati, the legitimate owner of you all."

* * *

Revived by cordials and by words, Miss Ottempati came to herself again in the quiet room of the directors. She refused to visit the Studio, she refused the offer of a car. She insisted on leaving, then and there, the place where the insult had been offered. The excuses of the performers, the persuasive words of the lawyer were equally unavailing.

The next day and the day after that and for always, Pamela was inexorable.

"Sell it, sell it, at whatever loss."

An Anglo-American company scented a bargain. Within a week they had bought the factory for 300,000 lire. Pamela received this treasure with a shudder of delight and terror. But she cleansed herself of all scruples by giving 25,000 to the new hospital of Vareggio and another 25,000 to the Girls' Friendly Society.

So once more, in the changes of human affairs, there came true—according to what the Theosophists teach—the law of perfect equilibrium.

(From "L'ultima Traccia." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

FEDERICO TOZZI

(1883-1920)



THE HERDSMEN OF MACCARESE

(Translated by —)

THE sea was roaring, away beyond the junipers, many of which had been reddened and withered by the sun. The edge of the black pine-forest of Maccarese, with here and there a clearing, advanced toward some dark clumps of oak and elm. At the mouth of the Arrone, in the direction of Civita-vecchia, the sandy shore was bare of vegetation, and flared ruddily against the gleaming waters with their eternal spray ; but the clumps of elm and oak became larger and darker as they receded, intermingling with each other across the plain. The tallest elms stood twisted by the force of the landward winds ; their tops were bare, but on the lower half of each trunk there was a thick growth of new leaves, forming a low *maquis*.

The sea was uniformly blue : and smoke hung in the air from a ship come from the port of Fiumicino, although the sky seemed to have been swept clean for the sun's reception. At the edge of the plain, in the direction of Castel San Giorgio belonging to Prince Rospigliosi, were the reapers, as small as the fingers of your hand when you looked at them from the sea. They moved about amid the corn, all dressed in different colours : and seen through the glare of heat that rose quivering from the ground, they seemed to tremble too and disappear sometimes in the opalescent grey-blue haze

that filled the depressions in the plain towards evening. In another part of the plain you could see buffaloes somewhat darker than the red-brown earth : but the cows had already gone to water at the Arrone's mouth of their own accord. When the cows returned, it was the buffaloes' turn : but they remained higher up the river.

The harvest was almost finished at Maccarese. But the reapers were discontented at the way in which their foremen had settled their wages : every day they were becoming more and more disposed to make good their claims. The foremen were met with threats and insults whenever they showed their faces ; so one morning most of them disappeared and took refuge in the tower of Maccarese, between the sea and the forest, until the danger should have passed by. The tower, although originally plastered white, was as dirty and discoloured as if it had been black ; a rose that clambered over the wall and the verandah steps seemed to be its funeral wreath.

When the reapers heard of their foremen's flight, they ceased working and resolved to unearth them. But, not knowing where they were, and believing them protected by the authorities of Maccarese, they started a tumult and advanced, without any definite plan, towards Castel San Giorgio, the house of Prince Rospigliosi:

Now there were a score or so of herdsmen, charged with watching over the harvest. They ate and slept at the tower, but did not wish to interfere in this affair—that was a job for the authorities. They were all between thirty and fifty, the older ones being somewhat corpulent with gold rings on their fingers and sometimes in their ears also. Their families lived in the various farms ; and some of them went across to their cows every evening late, and returned before dawn. They were under a sort of leader, who had two silver stripes on his coat-sleeves : his name was Corrado. This man was still unmarried and at each new harvest chose a new girl to lie with ; this year he had a mistress from Colle della Vipera. He had noted her among the other girls, and felt attracted by her : so

he had remained near her for a while, on one pretext or another, without getting off his horse. Pompilia—this was her name—understood at once, and blushing raised her liquid black eyes to his face ; but she waited until he should be able more conveniently to speak to her, for her father and brothers were among the knot of other men, and would be angry and offended.

The other herdsmen were favourable to his enterprise and made him stand them several litres of wine, for he was now more than certain that he could get the girl.

“And if I should succeed in placing her as maid in the big house?” said he, lighting a cigar.

“In that case,” said another, “I do not see how you will be able to visit her when you wish.”

Corrado laughed, clattering his boots against the floor. But a fair-haired fellow, with eyelashes as light as if they had been powdered with dust, was all excited enthusiasm for the enterprise.

“You must get her away from the harvesting to-morrow,” he said, stretching out his hands with the fingers wide apart.

“To-morrow, to-morrow,” repeated one of the oldest present, without looking up at anybody : he had long eyebrows turned downwards, and the eyes of a dormouse, and was not quite right in his head.

Corrado placed one of his legs over the other and said : “Help me then. No one goes to bed until we have settled on a plan. I’ll stand you another six litres.”

“She should be yours,” the fair-haired man broke in abruptly, “and she should like you all right.”

“She does.”

“Quiet down there at the bottom of the table,” shouted out a herdsman with black hair and a head set high.

They obeyed, rose one by one and formed a circle round Corrado, who was holding the tip of his chin between his first finger and thumb. His eyes were shining blue as the sky, his cheeks were extended in a smile.

“What are you thinking of?” asked one.

Corrado took his legs from under the bench, rose to his full height and answered : "Got it."

"I can guess your idea," said another : "you will send her to your cousin's house."

"Right : but you do not know what reason I shall give."

They watched him, smiling ; for he was ingenious besides being liked by everyone.

"She shall say that she is ill with malaria : we send her to the big house : harness the gig and carry her off with me."

At this idea the herdsmen started shouting and whistling, beating time with their fists on the table.

The next day Corrado did as he had said. But Pompilia really and truly attracted him ; he felt that he loved her.

He did not mind this : but should he not have felt some affection for other things too ? He wanted to love everything he saw, the junipers, the pines, the acacias with their white flowers hanging in bunches. . . . But he never found anything to love save the girl, as young as himself ; and he could love her because she never said anything that was not right.

* * *

Corrado had stopped his horse for several minutes, giving himself time to finish his half-cigar : suddenly he sneezed, the horse started off, but he did not stop it. In the middle of the path, he came across a herd of buffaloes, who rose at once, almost all together : he spurred his horse and began hitting at them with his beechen pole, and the buffaloes entered the field, where they disappeared up to their bellies in the long grass. He put his horse at a walk and approached one of them ; it ran away to avoid him. It was thus that he passed his days now. When he saw a bird, he watched it as if his regard could have stopped its flight and caused it to fall to the ground ; but the buffaloes pleased him more, for he beat them till he felt his strength fail him, and then their eyes became tender.

He would sit on his horse with his legs stretched out stiffly

and his body inclined backwards : and then he would clutch at the mane with one hand, as if it was a plant that he could pull up. The horse did not mind it, perhaps, but all the same it lengthened its step. And then he, as if to finish it, put his spurs into its sides, and went galloping at hazard for miles and miles, jumping over the marshy places full of green reeds, going round the cattle-enclosures ; keeping to the fences.

Pompilia used to expect him, but without even feeling the need to wait at the window for him. She remained in one corner of the kitchen, in the company of Corrado's cousin, timidly smiling up at her and blushing every time she came near, even when the other was not thinking of paying any attention to her. She would have been calmer and happier if her father and brothers had not had to be out harvesting. Some evenings (but as often as not they were too weary) her father would send his younger son, no more than a lad as yet, to find out how she was : and she, as Corrado had told her, would feel her pulse and answer without rising that the fever still continued.

"So you are not coming back yet ?" her brother would ask. And she would shake her head.

Her brother would then glance round the kitchen grinning, and depart with a "You're quite a lady here" for salutation.

But after a week of this life Corrado called to Pompilia's father, made him sit down beside him on a bank and promised to marry the girl by the end of the year. The reaper rose, looked him in the eyes and answered : "You will have a wife who is stronger and handsomer than yourself. But in the meantime, why do you not send her back to her harvesting with us ?" And without another word he returned to his companions.

The tumult began a few days later, and Pompilia's father thought no more of her or Corrado. The harvesters, women and men, were more than three hundred. The women, who mingled with the men in little groups of five or six, had their heads tightly wrapped in white handkerchiefs and their hands bound with strips of woollen material, in order to protect

themselves from the sun. The men went barefoot in their shirt-sleeves, each with his sickle. The older ones were standing in the middle, and the others round about. There were also some boys of fifteen, who in the midst of all this excitement were grinning somewhat agitatedly : they did not know what was going to happen, and most of them thought that they were going to their deaths. Everyone was emaciated by fatigue and heat : the women, after a week's harvesting, no longer recognised each other, they seemed to have grown old and wrinkled.

Suddenly someone called out : "Let us burn the corn-stacks." Everyone agreed to that, and a hundred voices answered : "At once, at once." The others did not know what to reply, but nevertheless shouted confusedly.

Hanging on one of the hurdles that formed the fence were a number of snakes, killed in the fields among the corn : the harvesters cut them in pieces with their sickles as they passed. They were already not far from the clearing where the stacks stood, but they were not walking quickly. Two herdsmen followed them on horseback, without saying anything, as if come to listen. The reapers, in order to keep up their courage, avoided looking at them, and when they found them at their side, ceased talking and pushed their way further into the crowd. Everyone was stretching up his head and trying to look over the confused mass of heads and shoulders and to see what was happening outside : but the fields were deserted. The huge elms with their great dark branches seemed to form a barrier against the wind : and the falcons flew low, beating the air with their wings, without letting you see their heads. The two herdsmen twisted round their saddle-bows the long reins which reached almost to the ground, and departed to summon their comrades. They were not afraid, but they did not know what to do. They felt that they were responsible for seeing that the stacks were not burnt, and as they rode off side by side, looking at each other in silence, they fixed their hats more firmly on their heads, and from time to time turned round to look at the harvesters.

Would it not have been better to have tried to turn them back? The younger man in particular would have desired an attempt of the two alone, but he was too much disturbed to dare to suggest it to his companion. There was no time to be lost! They would be ashamed to show their faces in Maccarese if the men succeeded in setting fire to the stacks: and so they felt themselves prepared to go to any lengths to stop it. Their faces became almost sinister, their eyes stern and shining.

"Your horse is better than mine," said the older man: "put it at a gallop and go and inform the others. I am going back."

"And if they start throwing stones at you?"

He replied:

"There are no stones where we are now."

But the younger man feared for the other's safety.

"You had better stay here, half-way between them and the rest of us."

The other raised himself in his stirrups and approached him menacingly.

"Do not begin answering me back. Go along!"

The younger man spurred his horse twice and began to beat with his fists on his horse's head: half a minute later he was under the walls of the tower.

The other remained where he was, fingering his grey beard. His nerve had gone now, and he could not decide whether he should gallop after the harvesters. He turned his horse round and round and listened. The shouting had not stopped; it was increasing, rather. He resolved to learn what they were doing. He almost rode over a shepherd who had skinned a sheep and was now inflating it.

A dog followed him barking, until he reached a canal thickly covered with reeds among the flowering broom. His horse was tired out, and advanced panting with long strides. The herdsman felt his heart beating as if he were afraid, but he managed to put himself in front of the harvesters. They were preparing to cross the Arrone, in which the reflections of the

elms and eucalyptus trees quivered slightly on the steeply arched bridge, only a few yards wide, and one end of it had sunk.

"Where are you going?" he called out in a strangled voice.

The harvesters spread out and quickened their steps, resolved on getting on to the bridge in spite of him.

"What do you want to do?" said he, barring the way with his horse.

"It is necessary to burn the stacks," those behind shouted out.

"Why? What has the corn been doing to you? Have you quarrelled with that too?"

But the leaders were resolute and had succeeded in getting on to the bridge, by walking along the top of the side-walls. A boy had passed under the horse's belly. A group of women were threatening the animal's eyes with their sickles.

The herdsman had by this time found his voice again and shouted: "Stop, everyone, and go back. Tell me what you want."

"The authorities have broken faith with us."

"How?"

"You are trying to reduce our wages by a lira a day."

"That is not true."

"Thief, rascal! Do not waste your time with him! Forward! Throw him down!"

The women were shouting, threatening him with their sickles: the men were thinking how to remove him from their path. Finally twenty of them at once rushed upon the horse, which gradually retreated sideways on, towards the further end of the bridge. The others advanced, pushing and elbowing each other without discrimination: and when one shouted, his neighbours were encouraged to do likewise.

The herdsman got himself out of their way, saying: "Even if you have been deceived by your foremen, you need not quarrel with us nor much less with the corn."

Nobody heard him: and the laggards started running in order to catch up with the others, who were already moving round the stacks. The herdsman descended from his horse, prepared to sacrifice his life if necessary; but hearing a con-

fused noise from the direction of the *maquis*, he turned. The other herdsmen had arrived ! He remounted his horse and awaited them.

• The herdsmen were armed with guns : they had already decided what to do, and advanced towards the stacks without loss of time. Nevertheless, several of the most violent harvesters still wanted to go near the corn ; but Corrado separated himself from his companions and called out :

“I shoot anyone who goes a step nearer.”

The herdsmen shouldered their guns. The older men folded their arms, the women let forth screams half frightened, half contemptuous.

“Go back over the bridge.”

The reapers obeyed. Behind them rode the dark file of herdsmen, beside a stretch of elms and holm-oaks.

“I’d have killed him myself, if he was not to be my son-in-law,” said Pompilia’s father to his companions, indicating Corrado with a glance.

(From “Giovani.” Milano, Treves, Publishers.)



MASSIMO BONTEMPELLI

(-)



(I)

ROUTINE

(Translated by Miss PHYLLIS J. WARD)

IN this life we do not all resign ourselves to being as other men are. Though a life above all common laws is a romantic and much-abused ideal, one that is subordinated to all the artificial rules invented by men is a poor thing, a voluntary abasement of oneself to the ranks of the common herd. We must keep some element, some part of our organization that refuses to obey antiquated laws ; that alone will be enough to preserve the mechanism of the spirit intact. Society sets many seals on the individual before declaring him fully formed. It puts one mark on his intelligence, one on his activities, one on his sentimental life, and so on.

Fortebraccio Solario resented this ; he wished his life to be immune, in some part of it, from the laws decreed by society ; he was unwilling to be a man like so many other men. The day when he received his degree in law, on a unanimous vote, at the Royal University of Turin, was one of grievous mortification for him. Henceforth a seal was set on his actions just as a brand was put on calves : "Healthy. May be slaughtered." "Thirty marks ; may exercise a profession." From one year to the next, from one examination to another, he had arrived at that point, and through weakness, through unwillingness to hurt his kind old parents. They came specially from the

country to Turin that day, that most auspicious day. His mother wore a bonnet with two satin ribbons tied beneath her chin. She clasped her boy to her breast, while his father moped his brow and gazed at him, open-mouthed. They took a ride along the Valentino Gardens and presented him with a gold watch bearing the happy date. His mother said to him, "Come, come, my Forte, my fine young doctor ; cheer up ! What's the matter ?" His father smiled a long, ecstatic smile and asked him every now and again : "What time is it ?" then he displayed the gold watch and the two old souls quivered with joy. Fortebraccio gave in to their emotion. The next day they all went back to the little hometown, travelling first-class. There was a dinner, with special invitations and congratulations without end. His father had had scores of elegant cards printed, with the words "Fortebraccio Solario—Doctor in Jurisprudence," and underneath, at one side "Announcement of the conferment of his degree." He sent them to all the people he knew and then gave those that were left to Forte to send to his friends. Fortebraccio took them, and at night, when he was alone, he destroyed them. It pleased his conscience, like a first act of rebellion.

* * *

But the lawyer Fortebraccio Solario was preparing his soul for more dread and open rebellion, of what kind he did not yet know. He soon resigned himself to being called "lawyer," which was very irritating at first, because after all it is a harmless title. He found it impossible to work seriously in the office where he had started his apprenticeship. The work was very common-place. He took refuge from his memoranda in dreams of a free, novel life.

A secretary and a girl-typist worked in his room. Fortebraccio would bite his pen and look beyond the desk piled with papers, along the wall black with book-shelves, out of the window on to the grey courtyard. The girl tapped the keys all day and sometimes looked at him ; her eyes were black and soft with a restless flame always glowing in their depths.

Then she bent her head again. Her name was Giacinta. Fortebraccio soon got used to the noise of the typewriter, but not to the thought that in that room and in others nearby many human beings busied themselves hour by hour, day by day, with things that were paltry, base and ridiculous, with thefts, slander, squabbles and fraud, and they did it methodically, in prescribed hours and according to prescribed rules. At seven o'clock in the evening, the fair-haired typist lifted her head, covered her machine and bade him good-bye with a smile. Then they all went away.

Fortebraccio spent the evenings in a café or in friendly visits to some family. Mothers and daughters all wooed him ; the mothers thought "He's a good boy, affectionate to his family ; he'll be an excellent son-in-law." The girls said to him, "You are a poet, lawyer Solario, why don't you write verses ?" Forte's mother made enquiries about the dowries. Forte smiled and pitied them all ; when he was in bed with the light out the images of all these people blended in his mind to form one vast wave of pity that was not unmingled with contempt. He went to sleep with thoughts of undefined greatness, of a pure life, of liberty. The next morning he took his accustomed place opposite Giacinta's golden hair. It was parted in the middle, threaded through with a blue ribbon. The other occupant of Fortebraccio's room was an ordinary commoner, true type of the man like other men, anonymous, a mere cog in an inanimate machine. Women are more intelligent. In the depths of Giacinta's black eyes that flame was forever restless. The girl was not content ; Fortebraccio understood clearly that, like him, she intended this to be but a stage in her journey, that she dreamed of a future more living and more worthy of her.

He had to leave it all, at any cost. But where was the way out ? When could he take it, and how ? Fortebraccio was not anxious for greatness ; he knew that he was neither a poet nor a hero ; all he wished was to avoid becoming a man like so many others. And so he waited for the opportunity, gnawing pen after pen, eating away his own heart too, looking

beyond his work at the fair hair or the grey courtyard. The lawyer was not satisfied with him and never gave him anything serious to do. One day Fortebraccio's mother met him and asked him for news about her son's progress. The lawyer said that he thought him unfitted to exercise his profession.

Signora Giovanna and Signor Gustavo called their son to a solemn conclave. His mother spoke, his father listened, and Forte replied very respectfully : "I think the lawyer was right."

"What !"

"Mamma dear, I was not born for a life such as this, but for something . . . you understand . . . something higher."

"But say what you mean, for goodness' sake !"

"I don't know how to explain to you . . . but you know that there are many who must stay in their own country, and work steadily and follow a regular system . . ."

"But you . . . Madonna mia, speak plainly ; I don't understand."

"No, no, don't be afraid, mamma. I don't know myself even. But do you know what it will be best to do ? You give me something, a hundred lire, and I'll go away, I don't know where, to Paris or America . . ."

"Stop, for heaven's sake ! Oh, my poor boy ! Just listen Gustavo to what your son is saying, that—that . . . O unhappy that we are !"

Signora Giovanna indulged in even more bitter laments, and finally gave way to tears. Her good old husband stood by her side trying to console her and glancing uneasily at the guilty object of it all who stood at a distance in acutest humiliation. At a certain point he motioned to him to go and Fortebraccio retreated slowly but with a feeling of satisfaction. It grieved him to see the two old people thus, but it was a necessary crisis ; when the first moments had passed they would understand, and he was glad that such courage had inspired him and that he had determined his own fate at a stroke according to the principles which he had laid down for himself.

That night in their bedroom the husband and wife, in their night-caps, discussed it all. Signor Gustavo was a sensible man. He said to his wife : "I really think the boy was not born for the profession, and it's no good insisting on it. He needs some settled steady work ; we must find him a job." They found him one at Turin with an Insurance Association. They went with him, looked for a good boarding house for him and committed him with earnest entreaties to the landlady's care. And when they left him they gave him a surprise in the shape of an unexpected gift, a season-ticket between Turin and home so that Forte could come to see his relations every Sunday and any other free day.

* * *

Forte's job was a lowly and simple one ; his landlady took great care of him ; each Saturday evening he went home and each Monday morning got up at six to catch the first train bringing him back to town and the office.

He must find another way out.

But one day, in January, Forte received a telegram with the words "Father very ill. Come at once." He obtained permission and arrived home in the evening. Poor Signor Gustavo had died suddenly in the afternoon, just after lunch when he was going out. His wife had helped him on with his coat and was going to the door with him. Suddenly he lifted his hands to his head with a gesture of dismay and said : "I feel so ill !" He fell backwards and died.

Forte was overcome ; he had never seen death so near, had never thought that his father would be dead. Poor Signora Giovanna was unrecognisable. At the funeral there were many friends, and the lawyer, and Forte's former companion in the office, and people he did not know, some women too, among them, Giacinta. An old woman was with her with dyed hair and wrinkles, and wisps of yellow hair escaping from beneath her bonnet. This woman had a bunch of yellow chrysanthemums which she placed on the coffin, then she went to shake hands with Forte who did not know her.

Three days afterwards Giacinta and her mother came to pay Signora Giovanna a visit. Even she had not known Giacinta's mother before. The old women spoke to each other and wept. Giacinta said nothing but when they were going she pressed the young man's hand very affectionately.

Forte went back to Turin more out of tune than ever with it all. He finished his work punctually, made no great friends and did not know what to think of his life now. He exchanged a picture post-card now and again with Signorina Giacinta. Sometimes the memory of his ambitions enraged him, the thought of his mother filled him with emotion. When his trial year was over, he became a permanent clerk ; his superiors were fairly well satisfied with him.

Every Saturday he went home to his mother. He often met Giacinta on Sunday ; once he stopped to greet her, another time he accompanied her as far as her door, another time he was persuaded to go in and bid " Good-day " to Signora Doralice ; he was shown into an antiquated drawing-room full of yellow things. He went there again other Sundays and little by little an idea became clearer in his mind.

He had four days' holiday for Easter.

On Easter day Signora Doralice was busy outside ; the two young people were alone in the drawing-room and it was twilight, Forte told Cinta that he loved her and the girl did not withdraw from his embraces and kissed his mouth very languidly.

One of Fortebraccio's fellow-boarders came with his wife to spend the evening with Signora Giovanna. He had brought a cake, and Signora Giovanna opened a bottle of white wine. Then these two, who had been friends of poor Signor Gustavo, remembered his kindly soul and they all wept a little. Afterwards they composed themselves, ate the cake and drank the wine.

They talked about Forte's good luck in living in a big, fine town and made some laughing insinuations about his doings in Turin. Forte smiled, but his mother protested : " Poor soul, he is an angel, this boy of mine. But your mamma is

thinking about something . . . yes, something. . . ." The others urged her to explain, but not Forte. However, she only said : "Forte is twenty-five now. It is time to think of settling down, my boy."

Fortebraccio felt a great anger in his heart that tormented him all night and would not let him sleep ; the memory of Giacinta's mouth broke in upon it, filling him with a disturbing sweetness. He raved all day in Turin about his love and his mother's plans ; towards evening he received a short letter from Cinta, full of restrained passion. His resolution grew stronger ; Fortebraccio's horizon brightened suddenly after such gloomy shadows. It was freedom.

It was freedom, because that theory of his that had laid neglected revived and urged him on, blending with passionate love in a new and magnificent project. He was neither poet nor hero, enough for him to be not as so many others were. What did it matter that his daily activities were dominated and ordered by the most common laws ? Love was opening out to him a life of sentiment which must be free and exempt from all rule. Clarion-calls of victory rang out boldly in his soul. The next morning he wrote to his beloved a letter-full of passion and daring. He proposed to her that they should run away, urged her to join him at once, to come and belong to him freely, without submitting to the common law of all common men, the law which ruins spirit and individual.

Only a few hours after he had sent it his intoxication wore itself out and remorse set in. How would she understand his pure, noble words ? The next day he received no message from her. He blamed himself for his foolish impulsiveness. It was clear that the girl had not understood ; she had taken his proposal for an insult. He ought to have been more cautious, ought to have spoken to her first and explained his intention. Two more days passed without news. Now the most important thing was to beg for forgiveness ; he must write again. After leaving the office he went home and began to write, then he tore up the letter and started again. Then he thought that he would see her on the Sunday and would speak to her

then. He heard a knock at the door, murmured "Come in"; the door opened and Giacinta appeared.

* * *

Fortebraccio's surprise overcame him for a time, then he went to her and threw himself into her arms, bursting into tears. She touched his hair hesitatingly. When he was calmer Forte made her sit down, murmuring "You have come; you understood. . . . Giacinta, how fine you are." Giacinta said smilingly, "I asked a friend to write and invite me to Turin for a day or two. Mamma was able to get me leave that way and she paid for my ticket." She laughed then and he felt a little disconcerted.

Shadows crossed his mind, doubts about her, about her soul, about their future. They were vague shadows and Forte could not grasp them. Suddenly he asked her in a whisper the only question that presented itself clearly to his mind: "Has the landlady seen you?"

Giacinta expected quite a different remark and looked slightly put out. She replied rather sharply: "I don't know whether it was the maid or the landlady."

They went out together and walked by the river. Fortebraccio asked after her mother and Cinta replied with a word of love. The spring twilight was tender and full of drowsy warmth, peopled with rosy shadows and aquiver with song. That word lured the young man's soul to sweetest intoxication.

They dined in a restaurant near the Po; the water murmured, gleaming between shadows and leaves, while the stars began to twinkle through the darkness. They talked quietly and vaguely of love and their life to be. In his heart Forte was wild with joy that his dear Cinta had understood his thoughts so well and agreed at once so unreservedly, with such loving trustfulness. Yet he would have liked to repeat his reasons and improve upon them, but he was prevented in some way. Little by little as the hour grew late a sense of vague uneasiness grew stronger in his mind. She anticipated it. At ten o'clock:

"I must go to Laura's," she declared.

"Who is she?"

"My friend ; the one I asked to write to me."

"Oh. . . ."

"She thinks I arrive about this time."

"Have you nothing with you ? No suit-case?"

"No," replied Cinta, laughingly. "We women don't need so much as you."

"And . . . to-morrow?"

"To-morrow we'll see each other again, of course. I've come for your sake. We'll talk more calmly . . . about everything."

"About everything ! Did you read my letter carefully?"

"I have it here," replied Giacinta with an alluring gesture.

"You understood, didn't you ? I was so afraid"

"Afraid of what ? Baby ! Good-bye till to-morrow."

She fled, and Fortebraccio was left slightly disconcerted to spend the night in agonies of impatience. He thought of so many little things and was annoyed with himself for doing so. He would have to find another boarding-house, with one or two furnished rooms, for the moment. He did not know how to broach the subject to the landlady, and then how could he write and tell his mother that he was changing his rooms ? But Cinta had understood, Cinta was willing ! When would the scandal break out ? Because Signora Doralice was sure to make a great out-cry about it at home, then his mother would know all about it. How dreadful ! But it was a necessary crisis. Love and liberty were at last entering into his mean and common life. He had known how to wait, and now was his hour of triumph ; he had freed from the shackles of brutal laws his own sentimental life, man's only true life. Fortebraccio Solario in spite of everything could say now : "I am not a man like so many other men."

However, Giacinta had not understood ; the next morning she explained herself clearly. It was rather that she had understood and appreciated his thought but felt that she lacked the courage it required. She loved him with all her heart, she was willing to give up her life to him but not in that

way, for she could not, nor did she know how. They spent many hours together, by the side of the Po, in cafés and restaurants, like two lovers waiting for evening. He was intoxicated with her presence and did not know how to answer her. At night she went to sleep at her friend's house. The next day he could not resume his argument, but their conversations about the life they would live together became more fascinating and more definite. And Fortebraccio married Giacinta because he loved her. Signora Giovanna was inconsolable and this was a source of deep sorrow to Forte, but he could not help thinking that at any rate by his rather sensational marriage, amidst the malicious talk of the home-town, that was rife on the subject, and against his mother's wishes he was making a departure from the common rule and was not acting in this matter as so many others do.

They lived alone for several months in two modest rooms, and Fortebraccio was proud and happy. He was drunk with love and he meditated on his new liberty while enjoying it to the full. For the first time in his life, in losing himself in another's soul, he felt his own acquiring its full faculties. They lived alone like lovers hiding themselves from a world that would cast them off. Fortebraccio heard from his colleagues of continual disputes in their family life ; he caught glimpses of homes troubled by quarrels because all the members of the family wanted to enjoy themselves, to have their fling, the women especially ; but he had severed every link with the world and convention, he and his adored, adorable Cinta.

She had a child after a year ; Signora Doralice had come to Turin to look after her. Fortebraccio was very pleased to have a son ; Signora Doralice gave the young couple much good advice on domestic matters, and on the best way of cutting a good figure in the world ; she also advised Forte about his career. Signora Doràlice went back to the country after several weeks.

Four or five months later they had to engage a nurse because Giacinta was losing strength. Her mother took it upon herself to find one and brought her to Turin. It was a period

bristling with difficulties ; they had to find another house. Signora Doralice stayed again for some time with her daughter and son-in-law to help them and give them advice. She convinced her daughter that she ought to lead a more active life, keep in touch with people, make the acquaintance of Forte's fellow-workers and superiors—be in the swim ! as she always said. Her activity was amazing, her discoveries equally so ; she knew people everywhere. The nurse and baby had occupied the best room, and the mother-in-law slept with her daughter in the nuptial bed ; they turned the drawing-room sofa into a bed for Fortebraccio every night.

Cinta began to pay visits now and again and to buy more clothes. Forte had a slight increase of salary. Giacinta had to have medical treatment to restore her strength and during the process she became more irritable every day with her husband ; this was put down to her illness. With her mother, however, she was on better terms ; Forte felt cut off from the two women, he had no indication of the day his mother-in-law intended to go home. The baby and the nurse were both doing well. Difficulties increased.

His mother-in-law put off her departure from day to day. She would have liked to see them more settled. And above all she impressed upon them that they must remove again, have a little more furniture to keep up appearances better and receive people who might be able to help them, more fittingly. Giacinta fumed and clenched her teeth at the stupidity of her husband. They studied many economical plans, the three of them together, the two women talking a great deal, Fortebraccio saying less. The discussion was renewed every day in the same form ; Fortebraccio knew that his colleagues had disputes of that kind ; how degrading they were ! One day he made a proposal : "I've got an idea."

"Let's hear it."

"If I was to try my fortune ?"

"How ?"

"Well, I go away, without any plans. I take a hundred lire, and go away to Paris, or America—" They did not let him

finish. Signora Doralice lifted her head to take a good look at him. "Idiot !" hissed Cinta.

Fortebraccio suddenly remembered that not many years before, at home, he had made the same proposal ; his mother had said : "My poor boy !" He was touched by that memory. The two women continued to argue without taking any notice of him. He continued to remember things ; he thought of his dead father, of his mother far away, and doubly so now, of his sad, unfulfilled life, of his one ambition, so modest, and so wise. He had not asked of life glory nor greatness, only that he might not be in everything, and too obviously a man like so many others.

Meanwhile his mother-in-law had found the most sensible solution for the economic problem. She had to call him loudly to rouse him from his melancholy meditations.

"Eh ?"

"I'll come to live with you."

The solution was the only possible one. Signora Doralice went home to sell some of her belongings, had others brought to Turin, found an empty suite of rooms, furnished them, arranged everything. She had a small capital and knew how to turn it to the best account. Then she began to take Giacinta's conduct in hand seriously, furthered her connections with influential people, pleaded the cause of her son-in-law. Forte had another increase of salary and promotion to an assured and honourable position. Then another baby was born. Many of the right sort of people frequented their house. Giacinta dressed well and paid many visits, Fortebraccio had a host of friends, was respected, received further promotions. Giacinta was "at home" on Tuesday afternoons and on Friday evenings. The other days she had many outside engagements. She often made new acquaintances and Forte had to take visiting cards here and there. Sometimes he had to pay calls too. If he happened to be in the house apart from meal-times he felt that he was in the way, and when no strangers were there the house rang with the babies' screams or the squabbles of the parlour-maid and the nurse. Forte

grew more and more odd and reserved ; he could not sleep at night. He spent the evenings in a café playing cards. He dared not speak of his troubles because he knew that they would laugh at him. He heard of quarrels in other families. He knew that everyone of the others had domestic worries, wives they no longer loved, tyrannical mothers-in-law, quarrelsome nurses and maids, screaming babies. He was like all the rest, and this was the very thing that maddened him. He shared head-aches and insomnia even with so many others. There was no further way out, and he brooded more and more, concentrated on one idea till his hair began to grow grey, till they made him Knight of the Crown of Italy. Then there was a reception at his house at which they all toasted him, and he made no reply and felt that many must be thinking him a perfect imbecile, thinking it and repeating it to each other, indifferently, just as they said it of so many others.

Two days later the women-folk were due to leave town for the country as spring was far advanced. He was to join them on the Saturday and to return to town on Monday just as so many other Knights and so many other fathers of families do. They left in the afternoon ; in the evening he dined at the restaurant and then went home. He thought he would find the house quiet ; it was cold and empty and desolate. He looked for the portraits of his father and mother, the mother who had said "My poor boy" when he had spoken of going to America. His temples throbbed, he felt as cold as ice and then burning hot ; at one moment he began to dance round the room. Every time he passed the window he noticed that some of the neighbours from the other side of the courtyard were standing looking at him, but he cared not for them ; he was almost pleased. At a certain point he stopped in the middle of the room ; everything seemed to be swimming round him ; there was a continuous hum in his ears and when it stopped he broke into a peal of laughter.

Then he went to sit down in an armchair and in the silence of the empty house he began to meditate seriously. Little by little thought conjured to his face an enigmatic and mis-

chievous smile. He closed the window and the shutters. Then he gathered a heap of newspapers under an arm-chair and lit them with a match. Before long the flames reached the fringe of the chair, caught hold of it all. Then Fortebraccio went out, closed the door behind him, calmly walked down the steps. He went into the street to wait for developments. After a while flames could be seen pouring from the windows, cries rang out, people ran to and fro, the fire-brigade arrived. A policeman, seeing him there, asked him for information. He replied gravely : "I am a Knight of the Crown of Italy ; this is my house and I have set it on fire. I don't think so many others would do that."

The result was that he was sent to the Lunatic Asylum, where, after several days of stupor, he grew calmer, settled down, became quiet and lazy, a madman like so many others.

(From "Sette Savi." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)

(II)

WHEN I WAS IN AFRICA

(Translated by —)

I NEVER had any real inclination for murder. In fact I have killed up to now—only my friend, Amilcare ; and when I consider this deed now that a long time has elapsed, it seems to me that it was not a bad idea, after all.

It happened many years ago in the town of Casablanca.

I had gone to Casablanca to recover from a love trouble, caused by an American girl, who had followed me from Europe to Asia, and had forsaken me there. As I naturally began to hate Europe, Asia and America, I decided to live for a certain time in Africa—seeing that Australia is too far away. This is why I was at Casablanca—which, as some people know, is just in Africa, on the Atlantic. At Casablanca there were many Italian workers who laboured during the

day, many Provençal *cocottes* who worked during the night, and many French francs.

Just to calm my embittered mind, I remained shut up in my room all day long, writing a life of Ruggero Bonghi, with the help of documents I had gathered in my travels. At night I used to go out and take a modest *mazagran* in one of the two hundred tabarins which flourished in that noble colony. It was in one of these resorts that I made the acquaintance—I should really say the friendship—with a modest and passionate man whose name was Amilcare. He was a Portuguese born in Brazil, who sold carpets from a great stock which he had brought with him. He would come every night to that tabarin to gamble at the *roulette* and lose all he had been able to earn during the day. I did not gamble, for I had noticed several times that I was unlucky, but stretched myself on an easy-chair to wait for him.

Happily it never took more than an hour for Amilcare to lose all he had. Therefore, towards midnight, he came to remove me from my easy-chair, saying :

“This night I had bad luck.”

And we went home together, under the heavy tropical stars.

* * *

One night he told me, as usual :

“This night I had bad luck.”

We went away. But we had scarcely moved a step and were still on the threshold of the play-room, when he, putting a hand into his pocket to take out his cigarettes, found he had still one franc left.

“By Jove !” he said, “I have not lost all. I will go and stake it. I will soon be back.”

He had already nearly approached the *roulette* when he came again towards me.

“Where shall I put it ?” he asked.

“Where you like. Be quick.”

“No,” he insisted, “tell me on what number I have to stake it.”

"Well, on the 45."

"But there is no forty-five," he cried in a dejected tone, "there are only thirty-six numbers."

"All right, then, put it on the 36."

He hurried to the *roulette*. A minute later I heard the herald-like voice of the *croupier* announce :

"*Trente-six rouge pair et passe.*"

I saw the trembling back of Amilcare, and his hands stretching out towards the five-franc coins which were heaped by the side of his franc. Meanwhile he half turned his head towards me, asking with choked voice :

"Tell me quick, quick : where shall I stake these thirty-six francs ?"

I was bored. Just to make an end of it,

"Leave all on the 36," I replied.

"Re . . . really ?" he stammered.

I was imperative and pitiless.

"Leave all there."

As obedient as a dog, he left the money on that number. He turned a humble glance to me, upwards, and a glance of fear to the whirling *roulette*. Then the turning thing slacked down, stopped.

"*Trente-six rouge pair et passe.*"

A cry of astonishment was uttered by two or three people. The *croupier* was already counting out with indifference the sum of money to Amilcare.

"And now ?" he asked with a voice which seemed that of a ghost.

"And now," I said imperatively, "home !"

He was so full of humble admiration for me that he did not dare to object a word. He spread his one thousand two hundred and ninety-six francs in all his pockets, and, like a docile dog, like a woman in love, followed me without speaking.

* * *

On the following day I no longer thought of all this, of course, and was busy about Ruggero Bonghi. Amilcare came

to my house in the evening to take me out. He said nothing, only he proposed with indifference :

"Shall we go to the 'Flamboyant'?"

(This was the name of the tabarin). When we arrived there and I was going to lie down in my easy chair, he asked with discretion :

"Why do you not come for a minute near me? Are you not going to tell me a number?"

I hesitated for a moment, then consented.

"Stake on 5."

The 5 won.

And now?"

"Stake on 18."

The 18 won.

"And now?"

Amilcare was not surprised at all. The other players were, instead, and looked at me with a sort of fear. I felt embarrassed. I told him impatiently :

"I do not know, do what you like."

I turned my shoulder on him and took refuge in my big leather easy-chair. But he soon stood before me, calm :

"If you do not know, it means that I must stop a little."

He stood just there, on his feet, looking at me like one who is waiting for the doctor to speak while he is looking at the thermometer, or for the usurer of whom one has asked a loan : in short, as we wait for the word of a Superior Being.

I smoked two cigarettes, trying to avoid his eyes. For some-time I would stare at my right side, at a corner of the room—where there was nothing. Then I would turn quickly my eyes to my left side, passing him, to a corner where there was a small palm-tree. At the end of my second cigarette I addressed him suddenly :

"Well, what are you doing?"

"Nothing, my dear, nothing."

He was so pitiful that I burst into laughter, and so, whilst laughing, I happened to say—I do not know how, without any intention, just as one sneezes—:

"Seventeen."

Amilcare rushes away. I felt a remorse, but still I was not able to help listening. First a silence, then a buzzing, then the voice of the *croupier* :

"*Dix-sept noir, impair et manque.*"

The following night I too began to gamble, and Amilcare with me. We lost, I tried to play sometimes without him, and I lost. The other gamblers seemed to breathe again. Then Amilcare began to gamble again alone, and I suggested the numbers to him : he always won.

After a short time I was bored and said :

"Now let us go away."

We went out.

* * *

I know that readers would be glad if I told them some episode and incident of gambling, with more details, because they are amused by these silly things. But I do not write to amuse, I write to educate.

On coming out of the tabarin that third evening, Amilcare, who was an honest man, said to me :

"Let us make an agreement. We shall come here every evening. I shall gamble with my money. You do not gamble, you simply give me the numbers. When we come out, we go half and half with the winnings."

This we did for two months. Every evening I do not know what demon suggested the numbers to me, always the right numbers. I kept my eyes half-closed for a moment, I almost pricked up my ears, and a sort of inner voice, like a sudden springing sound, told me the number quite clearly. After seven or eight numbers I felt tired : that voice spoke to me no more. We went out. We won about fifteen thousand francs every night in this way.

* * *

But money destroys man's peace. As the money, magically won during the nights, was gathering in my coffer, my days became more and more colourless and restless. The Life of

Ruggero Bonghi proceeded too slowly ; and I had founded a hope of becoming famous on that book ! Now the book, and my glory together with it, were staggering, so to speak, were becoming a dim and bleak thing more and more each day, in each new page. It was the fault of the nocturnal emotions, the fatal effect of the easily obtained wealth.

Between Ruggero Bonghi and the 'Flamboyant,' however, my love pangs had subsided, the features of the faithless girl had faded from my memory. There was no reason left, therefore, for not going back to my native Europe.

Yes, there was one reason : Amilcare. How could I leave him thus ? I had not the courage to abandon him. His stock of carpets was finished ; now he lived and became rich only by means of my prodigious divination. And to him wealth did not give either boredom or troubles ; he was a simple soul ; he would never have written a *Life of Ruggero Bonghi*.

I said to myself : "When my winning gifts have ceased some day, Amilcare will have to think of some other way to live."

But how could I persuade him ? For now I felt deeply attached to him.

Days and weeks passed, and my impatience to get away increased. Then the idea came to me to try to induce Amilcare to live a worthier life—without, however, exciting any rancour against me—I being so much attached to him.

I matured my plan. I waited several more days before putting it in action. One day, when I had not succeeded in writing even a line, and felt that Ruggero Bonghi was vanishing from my mind just like the pretty unfaithful girl, I determined in cold blood to put my plan into operation.

We are at the usual *roulette* table. Amilcare is seated, I stand behind him as usual. And he, as usual, waits for the others to put on their stakes, not to have them imitate him and stake on his number. Then he turns his eyes towards me. I narrow my eye-lids, I prick up my ears and my heart, and the mysterious voice whispers within me : "Twenty-four." Then I say to Amilcare : "34."

The few seconds that the little ball took in its course seemed

centuries to me. I felt some remorse in having deceived him. I repented and promised myself to make him win the next hand . . . The little ball stopped. The 34 had won.

* * *

Any remorse then disappeared. I think I cast a terrible glance at Amilcare. I listened to my demon who suggested : "five," and I suggested to Amilcare "8." The 8 won. My inner voice told me : "twenty-one" ; I said to Amilcare "30." The 30 won. I said numbers at random : they all won.

I was not able to deceive him ; I was not able to make a mistake.

All the gamblers shouted. The bank suspended the game, laying a black cloth over the play table. Amilcare exulted.

I felt within me waves of violent rage. I shall never be able to deceive him. I shall never be able to get rid of him ! I shall never finish the *Life of Ruggero Bonghi* ! I shall never go back to Europe ! . . .

The public were commenting behind us.

"Let us go away !" I cried to Amilcare, pushing him, dashing against him, ramming him forward like a calf. He went forward. But whilst we were crossing a dark passage I seized him by his collar, lifted him and threw him from the window. I heard the thud of his body smashing against the pavement of the courtyard.

Then I descended by another staircase and came back to Europe at once, without even going to my rooms to change my dress.

Peace returned to my mind.

Only when I had already arrived at Naples, I remembered that I had forgotten in a drawer, in Africa, the manuscript and the documents of the *Life of Ruggero Bonghi*. Some day I must go back there and fetch them.

(From "*La Donna dei miei Sogni*." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)

corresponding motion which, so to say, appeared to cut saw-like notches in the skull and ended by grazing the brain.

Over-familiar faces of shipmates and too-often-heard conversations made the mind withdraw as it were into a hostile sheath, within which it tried once more to become a chrysalis in order to re-live a life of its own. Only those who know the torment of realising what is about to be said near by in the same words, with the self-same inflections, who sense the approach of the precise moment when the humorous phrase that for a second gives rise to the same weary smile on all lips will be repeated, can have any idea of the tedium of certain hours on board ship. Only those who know what it means perforce to have to listen to long yarns and in fancy to accompany in its flight, only with swifter wings, the slow, straight flying, languid bird, compelled to precede, turn back, fly round it, waste vain energy in multiplying the space covered, can realise the terrible sensation that turns words into a murmur of dry leaves, detached one by one by the wind of habit, only to bare the twisted branches of the soul. But perhaps it is as well not to know. It is useless to sound the lowest depths of life's barrenness, whence ever spouts that oily, bitter liquid called. . . .

" . . . adaptation . . ." said De Silla, the ship's electrician, to his colleague, Romero, the gunnery officer, who leaning back in an arm-chair was giving him, for perhaps the hundredth time, an analysis of naval tedium.

"I meant resignation," the latter replied, after a brief, thoughtful pause. "But perhaps adaptation is better : it is less sad and more practical."

"It's resignation all right on my part after listening to you for a good half hour. Look here ! Be merciful ! Either shut up or tell me something new."

They looked at one another for a few moments in silence, while the same colourless smile passed over their lips.

A short distance off other laboured conversations broke in on the rhythm of the ship's roll. From time to time the hollow voice of the Chief Engineer was to be heard uttering technical

words anent an oil recuperator which he was critically describing to two of his subordinates, who supinely assented in silence. In gayer tones a midshipman recounted how on the Berka road he had met a little Arab girl, a tramp, called Sleima. She had, it appeared, a strange fascination for Italian men, whom she would dupe by a sudden flight into the night. With her vanished her wild laugh, her artificially perverse smiles and the languid promises she had murmured in the wake of the solitary wayfarer.

This was the only note of life in the depression that overwhelmed those twelve men, shut up within the four walls of white-painted iron. It seemed like a cool jet of water lost in burnt-up desert sand.

"Lucky devil," murmured Romero, "he can still profit by the resources of youth ! That sort of thing was all over for me a long time ago. . . ."

"Oh ! You *are* amusing, aren't you ? Suppose you go to your bunk ?" suggested De Silla placidly.

"I can't. Look at the clock. It's a quarter to eleven and at midnight it's my watch. . . . I must endure. . . ."

A half-smothered yawn of resignation, scarcely modified by the shadow of a smile, showed that the prospect he offered his companion was not gay.

"Right then, carry on !" said the latter dejectedly. "I'm perfectly ready to listen to you repeat that from now onward, you are like a monk who has nothing left but his church and his saint : the church is the ship and the saint is the canon Oremus. . . . Then will come the statement that you are thirty-three and you have had fifteen years ceaseless navigation from one continent to another, without any rest, because—and there you're right—ministerial magnates, among whom your reputation is that of a queer chap, have made you the object of their special attention. . . . As on every other evening, you will tell me that you feel regularly shrivelled up by the familiarity of all our faces—aren't I right ?—and by the restless analysis of men of all races, that you are oppressed by the tedium of feminine monotony, a harvest reaped

throughout the world—isn't that so?—that you are a sceptic, indifferent, arid, surviving only by dint of inertia. . . . You see I haven't forgotten any of it : I know it all by heart, adjectives, nouns, images, phrases . . . But, wait a minute, there's the theory of the 'lingam' and the 'yoni' by which love is reduced to its embryonic essentials. . . . Naturally you have never loved, because such a sentiment is rather different to the 'congres' of Sanscrit origin . . . I know, I know. . . ."

"You're wrong," quietly interrupted Romero. "I can never have said that because it would not correspond to the truth."

Half raising himself in his chair, De Silla quickly placed his elbows on the arms to steady himself as the ship rolled.

"What? What's that you say?"

"I said," continued Romero phlegmatically, "that you're wrong."

"Would you have me believe that you have sometimes descended from your lofty granite pedestal to kneel as we have done, before a poor little mortal. . . ."

"Not some times : once only."

"Great Scot !" continued De Silla, scrutinising his shipmate with humorous attention as though he saw him in a new light. "Then it was a passion."

"I should think so, judging by the memory of it."

"It lasted a long time?"

"Not very long : six hours."

De Silla opened his eyes wide, stared fixedly with an air of suspicion and surprise and then resumed his usual look.

"Are you giving me tit for tat?"

"What for?"

"For my leg-pulling, I mean, some time back."

"Certainly not ; it is the truth."

"The truth? You stupefy me."

"I stupefy you, do I? Remember the root of the word."

"Thanks !" said De Silla, laughing. "I won't be stupefied any more, not even if you trot out the story of your six-hour passion. . . . Surely, if you've anything new to say, it's your duty to say it, isn't it?"

"Of course."

"My lads !" exclaimed his shipmate, turning to the various groups in the ward-room. "Is there anybody here who knows short-hand ? Romero is going to give us the unedited story of one of his usual, bragging escapades. Wake up ! Wake up ! . . ."

On all sides arm chairs swung round towards one centre as though on imaginary pivots, making a small improvised auditorium. Conversation ceased and for a few minutes there was heard only the lap of the waves against the ship's sides, keeping tune with the mournful refrain of her roll. A supply pump, buried among the engines, seemed to be seized by a sudden fit of spite and for a few minutes exchanged its quiet beat for a convulsive sob. Then all was calm again. . . .

* * *

Romero glanced round without, however, seeing any one, and continued to sit in the same casual position, with his legs crossed and his head resting idly in the hollow of his right hand. Then, as though lowering the portcullis of the present, he half-closed his eyes and began to speak. His manner was narrative ; indeed, he might have been talking to himself.

"I swear," he said, "to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth."

"A necessary premise !" muttered De Silla, beneath his breath. . . .

"I must first warn you," Romero began without heeding his companion's caustic remark, "that, contrary to what you doubtless expect, none of the ports we know provides the setting for my story. The sea has nothing whatever to do with it. You might even say that the sea has never been kindly disposed towards me in such matters, but that rather she has always shown me her teeth, if you will excuse the phrase. Hence there is no Aziyade, not even a Carmencita, still less an O'Sa-io-San. Also in order to eliminate the grotesque which always seems to accompany the recital of one's own love affair when dished up for other people's indifference—meaning yours—I would add that my confidences compromise no one

because they apply rather to a type than to an individual. Moreover I shall do what is necessary to conceal what ought to be concealed.

"You will at once ask me whether I am not joking and giving the word love a sea-faring and hence a flippant meaning. Not in the least. Perhaps one is in the habit of regarding love as an obligatory progress up a kind of ladder of sentiment, which leads by way of hope and suffering towards a creature who becomes the idol of one's imagination and dominates one's whole being, one's reason, one's inmost self. Possession seems the supreme goal. In this one is the slave of nature—whose only care is the reproduction of the species. So true is this that few ask themselves whether beyond the longed-for goal there be not something other than mere vacuity, as is generally the case. Well, what I am going to say may be fantastic, but fantastic things have been said before now in the dreary hours of life on board ship. I assert then that this way of understanding love is false as an all-embracing proposition. Were a man and a woman to find themselves alone in a desert or on an uninhabited rock, so that the man was not obliged to appear in the woman's eyes as the supreme champion of his sex, and hence jealousy were impossible, do you not think that progress up the ladder of sentiment would be considerably shortened both in time and distance and that the level of hope and suffering would quickly fall? Well then, you see how large a part vanity inevitably plays in your conception of love. The chief fascination in the tremendous passions aroused by actresses and reigning beauties in the limelight lies in the fatuous argument: Ah! what a triumph if I could beat the crowd of admirers! Is that true or isn't it?

"Well, mine was a passion of the desert and the desert that gave rise to it was Paris. . . ."

"Romero," murmured De Silla in grieved tones, "I am afraid you ought to be shut up as insane."

The interruption only provoked a slight gesture on the part of the narrator, a gesture of indifference, of scarcely veiled annoyance. . . .

"... In December, 1918, when on the *Mirabello* at Taranto, I received an order to proceed at once to Plymouth, there to embark as Second in Command on the H12, a submarine sent from America for our fleet. There is no point in my telling you about the journey, most of which I accomplished standing or sitting on a suit-case in the corridors of the trains—those various receptacles of humanity of all races—which bore me from Taranto to Paris by way of Naples, Rome, Turin and Modane. It was the first days of the Armistice and the vast masses of military that had gathered in the battle zones of Europe seemed to be disbanding and drifting along the arteries of every country in every direction. Endless uniforms and types in indescribable confusion were making their way towards the cities, the great centres where all foregathered. Dead tired, I arrived at the longed-for Gare de Lyon and was very glad to learn at the Embassy that the Le Havre boat was not due to sail till two days later, which meant that I should have about a day and a half in Paris.

"Hotels were full to overflowing. Round the reception desks a crowd of homeless enquirers thronged, in eager hope of a favourable reply. Thanks to one of the directors of the Grand Hotel—an Italian, to whom I was known through previous visits—I was providentially given preference. Directly after lunch I threw myself on my bed and for several hours slept the kind of sleep that I had not for long enjoyed and that bore not the faintest resemblance to the troubled, worried sleep we always get on board.

"When I woke it was late in the evening. Through the open shutters of my windows the white glare of the Place de l'Opéra shone reflected, slightly dimmed by the haze. Thousands of patriotic shouts and cries, the sound of clapping, music, delirious yells, hooting of cars, all were fused into one continuous din which seemed to be the very voice of that vast metropolis, suddenly gone mad with joy.

"A few minutes later I was in the street, carried along by the human stream, first down the Boulevard des Capucines, then behind the mighty pile of the Opéra, towards the Galeries

Lafayette, its windows hidden beneath garlands and festoons of thousands of multi-coloured electric lights. These hung from the balconies above and reached to the pavement, forming a vast sheet of fire : an astounding sight, the Mecca of all Paris. Where the Boulevard Haussmann crosses the Rue des Capucines the dense crowd was like a great seething river. The side streets were merely the tributaries of other streams of humanity which swept along between the break-waters formed by the houses till they found an outlet, ever flowing, over-flowing, making eddies, gradually losing their impetus in the main stream with which one by one they became united. It would be idle to talk of individuals, of different sexes, of types. What is left of man in such a crowd ? At best the whitish oval of his face stands out above a black sea. His speech becomes no more than a confused murmur, a drop in the great ocean of sound, an indistinct nothing. A man's expression too often changes, is too often unchanged for it to register and classify any distinct emotion. He becomes a molecule in a multitude, losing the complex detail to which the eye is accustomed, only to assume the pale and simple aspect of the molecule as we see it reproduced and enlarged in scientific books.

"Bruised, pushed, dragged along, deafened, with mouths, eyes and arms on all sides of me and close to me, I felt as though I were at the mercy of some hostile element composed of matter totally alien to my own. As a swimmer concentrates on keeping his muscles taut when a wave breaks over him, so did my mind feel the need to accentuate its individuality in order to prevent being over-powered by the all-potent spirit of the crowd. This mind of mine made ever increasing attempts wholly to detach me from the hideous, limitless, suffocating mass, by climbing imaginary steps towards freedom and sovereignty.

"For me the enormous crowd represented no one. Never have I felt more solitary, more like the only living creature in a deserted world. A stranger, unknown, I felt certain I would find none of my kind, felt much as though I were in one of the

uninhabited regions of the earth, in one of the Polar seas, populated only by legions of icebergs, crowned by rows of pensive penguins.

"Suddenly, in front of the ugly glass doors of the Galeries, one wave of humanity collided with another, became so dense that it could not move. I was under a lamp. Contact with the cold iron gave me the sense of something new and restful. The post fulfilled the function of a pillar in a bridge, and provided me with what I might almost describe as a haven of relative calm. Looking down, I chanced to see a little boy of about eight or nine by my side. He was gazing at me silently with the deep, enquiring look of childhood. He was wearing a velvet *béret* pulled down over one temple, and round his neck a woollen scarf reaching to his little red nose, which was French and slightly *retroussé*. I gathered that he was a poor person's child by the fact that his long coat, worn though clean, had not been made for him, and by the condition of his shoes. Something in me pleased him and induced him to give me a timid little smile. He put out a tiny hand and raised it towards me.

" 'Monsieur,' he said ; I repeat his very words, 'Voulez-vous 'me traverser' la rue d'en face, monsieur ?'

"Alone, at night ! Alone in that terrible Paris crowd ! His request seemed to me so queer that I made him repeat it. There came into my mind the notion of a small branch broken down by a flood, and swept fatefully against a mighty trunk that had likewise been uprooted. I love children for the limpid look in their eyes and because they are so perfectly shaped by the unsullied hands of Nature. I was moved by the sight of that little hand, held out to me simply, confidingly. I took it in my right hand and held it tight, while with my left I supported the slender little body in order the better to protect it. Slowly we made our way across the stream of humanity, I acting as a shield. When we reached the opposite side, I thought the child was still none too safe, so I dragged him along a little further down the Rue Lafayette until we came to where the crowd had thinned and progress became relatively easy.

" 'Is that enough ?' I asked him. 'Is that all right ?'

" 'Oui, merci, monsieur. . . . C'est bien assez !'

" We were in front of a large perfumery, brilliantly lit and decorated in excellent taste with the ribbons of the French national colours. We were in the full light of the window. A young woman who was looking at bottles and phials turned at the sound of the child's voice and stared at us with curiosity.

" 'Right then, run along. Good-bye. . . . And Heaven help you !' I added in my own language, as I stood still, watching that innocent little creature once more alone in the hands of fate in the vortex of Paris.

" But I was filled with remorse for having left him like that :

" 'Look here,' I added, raising my voice slightly, for the child was already a few yards away, 'would you like me to take you home ?'

" 'Oh ! non, non, merci, je vous ai deja assez dérangé.'

" 'But I have nothing to do. It is no trouble.'

" 'Non, non, merci, maintenant je peux aller tout seul. . . . Au revoir, monsieur.'

" When the little chap had disappeared from sight, I looked round absent-mindedly at the shop-window and the young woman who had stopped in front of it. She was still gazing at me intently."

" Sorry if I'm interrupting," broke in De Silla at that point.

" But are we there now ?"

" We are. . . ."

" Then naturally the first thing you did was to look at your watch . . . so as to know when to begin the six hours, I mean. . . ."

" I did nothing at all," said Romero quietly, while his listeners inveighed against De Silla for interrupting. " I in my turn stared at the lady who had made me the object of her attention. Now, you fellows can have no idea of the strange atmosphere of the Paris streets during the first days of the Armistice. One was hail-fellow-well-met with all and sundry. One talked to anybody and everybody, quite regardless of

ceremony and anybody talked to you. Once freed from the terrible burden of the war, the French felt like a reunited family, safe and reassured. If you thought you could deduce specific conclusions from the fact that the girl next you in the 'metro' or at a neighbouring table in a restaurant asked you your impressions of such and such an event, you ran the risk of making a horrid blunder and being thought a country cousin. Nothing of the sort. It was *La Victoire* !

"Immediately sweeping aside all preliminaries, the girl said to me :

" 'C'est vraiment très gentil, ce que vous venez de faire, monsieur. . . .'

" 'The simplest thing in the world, madame.'

" 'Madame ? Pas encore, je vous prie.'

"She was smart, very *distinguée*, handsome : the handsomeness you notice on looking a second time, which is the only real and deep kind : the kind you see at first glance is for everybody and soon grows wearisome. I don't know whether you understand what I mean, but it doesn't matter. Every one has his own way of looking at these things. . . . Her aristocratic face was framed in furs. She wore a black velvet hat well down over her eyes. Fair hair, pulled out over her temples, made her look extraordinarily like the wax mannequins in the big Paris shops.

"Her voice was caressing, carefully modulated, now incisive, now elusive. Every word seemed marked by a subtle sense of wit. It was a voice one would love to hear all one's life. It gave the assurance that into any form of unhappiness it could instil grace, sweetness, gaiety.

" 'Est-ce que ma petite rectification vous a coupé la parole, monsieur ?'

" 'Oh ! not exactly . . . the fact is. . . .'

" 'Allez toujours. . . . Qu'est-ce que vous avez à me regarder comme ça ?'

" 'It is difficult to say'

" 'Mais parlez donc. . . . Ai-je donc l'air aussi drôle que ça ? . . . Ça devient de l'impertinence.'

"Well, that's just it. If I were to speak, I should perhaps be even more impertinent. . . ."

"Oh !"

"This *Oh !* was all I got for my first attempt to plumb the depths. Reserve, surprise, satisfaction, a touch of diffidence, all were revealed in that simple exclamation, which nevertheless did not help me to define the type. There was nothing faintly questionable in her appearance, no sign of anything untrue, no suggestion of anything in doubtful taste. If her lips were a little too red and her bright eyes slightly languorous owing to touch of blue pencil on the eyelids, well, that is frequently to be found in Parisian women of all classes who aim thereby merely to 'revive' their expression—a necessity due, so they say, to the greyness of their city. Hence I had to sound the depths once more, using a heavy lead as we do on board ship when we want to make really sure of the bottom.

"Et que me diriez-vous ?"

"Something like this : I am a foreigner spending a few hours in Paris. I am consequently unknown, alone, and with no aim and object. My parents spared no expense to educate me and, taking it on general lines, they seem to have succeeded. Hence you will realise my embarrassment in making you a strange request : Will you give me the pleasure of your company for an evening in this city, which for me is a desert. . . ."

"Tiens !"

" . . .and not refuse to dine with me, wherever you like. . . ."

"Vous allez vite. . . ."

"You must forgive me. I am a naval officer, accustomed to be ever on the move, ever at the mercy of orders. I have no time for subtle distinctions . . . but if you are uneasy, I'll say good-bye and go away."

"My unknown acquaintance looked at me for a few minutes with an interest that was quite comic, as if she were making a last, minute, definitive inspection. Was it to be 'yes' ? Or was it to be 'no' ? Then with a smile that seemed to come from within she moved her lips and raised her eye-brows.

"Ne saluez pas, parceque vous m'amusez et je ne me fâche pas du tout. . . . Seulement, laissez-moi donner un coup de téléphone. Attendez-moi ici. . . ."

"She went into the perfumers' and remained there for a few minutes. . . . From outside I heard the telephone bell, that small, sure, universal agent of woman's mendacity. . . .

"When she came out, she said simply :

"Ça y est . . . allons. . . . Votre programme?"

"I hastily announced one. Dinner at Henry's : then a theatre . . . Palais Royal, Athénée . . . both good-class and reputable . . . or Folies-Bergères, Olympia . . . both bad style and slightly disreputable . . . ? Her choice from the first or the second group would provide me with some sort of indication.

"Où, Palais Royal !" she said with absolutely genuine candour.

"I did not give up the struggle. In a last attempt I tried a brutal phrase, a phrase under which, I must admit, was but ill-concealed a hypocritical respect. I had an addition to it all ready though, should she parry my thrust.

"I want you to know that I shall ask nothing of you"

"C'est à dire?"

" . . . I meant neither your name, nor who you are. . . ."

"Ah !"

"But I was left with the impression that my deceitful little game had been discovered and cleverly volleyed. After that I made no further investigations and retired from what was but a vain and futile fencing-match. For months and months I had lived a life of war and blood-shed. All memory of the better era that preceded those months had dried up in my brain like a river in its bed. In a flash I had gone from the life of an anchorite to the wildest, most effervescent life a man can possibly lead. The sight of this girl, none of whose defects, sorrows or troubles I knew, this girl who had suddenly appeared out of the vast crowd like some mysterious creature in a fairy tale, this girl of whom all I knew was her beauty, her charm, her smile, gave me fresh life. I felt as though freed

from all alloy, fresher, more alive, than I had ever been, eager to experience everything that till then had been denied me, and ready to be led as a slave along the triumphal road of this world's beauty. In my 'amour propre' I glowed with pride as passers-by looked admiringly at my companion. The envy, of which I knew I was the object, had not, I felt, its equal in the world. She walked by my side with a longish, quick, springing step. Her fur coat swayed with an undulating, rhythmic motion, which I should have liked to perpetuate in some medium yet unknown to art.

"In the Boulevard des Capucines our way was blocked by a group of American soldiers arm-in-arm with girls with whom they had exchanged head-gear. We were pushed from behind. It was impossible to stop. Progress was difficult, so I took hold of her arm. Her warmth was immediately communicated to me and made my pulse beat faster, as though from some sudden excitement. The idea of letting go her arm as soon as we had got through the crowd seemed to me absurd. Had I done so, I was certain I should again be overcome by a feeling of intense chilliness.

"I told her so. She smiled and pressed my arm closer, thereby keeping my hand a prisoner in her fur.

"A little flower-girl ran towards us, offering us roses.

"*'Les blanches, monsieur? encore?'*

"I bought her all the white ones.

"*'Monsieur, votre dame est vraiment bien jolie,'* was the girl's comment as she made up the bunch. And in her words there was no suggestion of the usual artfulness of her kind, who, as a rule, say such things solely for mercenary purposes.

"*'Vous n'auriez pas pu me faire un plus grand plaisir,'* murmured 'my' lady, as we resumed our way down the Rue des Petits Champs, towards the Rue de la Paix. . . . A greater pleasure? That was what she gave me. Indeed, it came near being unreal. . . . I felt it in her every gesture, in the inflections of her voice, in the polished piquancy of her speech, in her touch, in her smile, in the profound simplicity of her reflections, in the subtle perfume she exhaled

which I breathed as a breath sent from paradise. In the matter of feelings, judgments, ideas, we at once found common ground, as though we had for long been searching for one another, and, now that we had found one another, were rejoicing in mind and body.

"When we went into Henry's, the glare of the electric light threw into relief the frank joyousness of her expression. On this, however, she imposed a mask more in tone with the surroundings, for as she passed between the rows of tables too many people lifted their eyes to look at her. Too many heads were raised from their plates in order to render the rather coarse homage that the well-fed man pays to the pretty girl who passes close to him—the last rung of the physiological ladder up which men climb as they eat.

"*'Surtout pas de champagne !'* she said, as she sat down, while a waiter handed me the wine-list. *'C'est stupide, nouveau-riche et inutile.'*

"She chose a few things in a hurry, carelessly. When the second course was brought, she let her fur coat slip off her shoulders. I then saw that her white neck and shoulders were set off by a black, velvet, sheath-like dress, cut horizontally from shoulder to shoulder, not very low. In the centre of it shone a little jewel of perfect workmanship, exotic in style.

"*'J'ai chaud, je ne sais pas pourquoi.'*

"*'Hot ! God ! Would that it were because of me. . . .'*

"As she smiled, her teeth shone between her red, lacquer lips. Still smiling, she said :

La vie est brève,
Un feu de rêve
Un jeu

"Then she stopped, with tightly pressed lips, as though about to say something foolish.

"*'Continuez donc. . . . Vous ne savez pas ?—'* she asked me.

"*'No ! I'm sorry I don't.'*

"*'Peut-être vous allez le savoir bientôt. . . . Ces sont de jolis vers. . . .'*"

"Sorry, Romero," broke in De Silla at this point. "But couldn't you manage to do without all this tiresome French? If I didn't know you, I should have thought you were being petty and showing off. . . ."

"I detest the pointless use of foreign languages more than you do, and above all the abuse of French which is a bad Italian habit," replied the narrator. "But were I to translate my heroine's words, I should spoil the intimate harmony that existed between her, the language and the setting, and should feel that I were introducing a false note. In any case, I take good care not to reproduce *my* French, despite the harsh dissonance in the dialogue. Wherever possible, I shall translate hers too. Can I go on?"

"Towards the end of dinner I noticed that a man at a table near by was looking intently at my companion through his monocle. This annoyed me. My feelings had indeed galloped away with me if I was already at the first stage, called jealousy, which as a rule takes much longer to reach.

"Perhaps I was wrong to turn so deliberately, so slowly towards this impertinent individual in order to return his insolent stare until he decided to look away and the reflection of his monocle disappeared from my optic field.

"*'Soyez sage, mon ami,'* begged my companion in a low voice. *'Je vous assure que je ne vous donne la moindre raison de chagrin. Mais, mon Dieu, comme vous allez vite ! Pourtant je vous comprends très bien : ici ce n'est plus le désert de l'immense foule anonyme d'où nous sommes jaillis tous les deux. . . . Ici c'est encore l'homme et il faut le frôler. Cela vous rend nerveux. . . . Voulez-vous que nous rentrons dans notre bon néant ?'*

"I consented with joy. We hastily finished out dinner. As I helped her on with her fur, she turned her head with a delicious smile, and murmured : *'Je m'appelle Yvonne : et pour le reste, mystère. . . . Et votre prénom ?'*

"*'Robert.'*

"*'Robert ? C'est joli. Venez Robert.'* And of a sudden my name seemed to acquire sweetness.

"In the taxi which took us to the Palais Royal we were too close to one another. The lights in the streets and the boulevards sped rapidly by in fantastic succession towards a realm of light created for us and for us alone. Several times, as the taxi bumped and bounded along, her delicious little head rested on my shoulder and remained there for the fraction of a second. But I felt that that fraction lasted infinitesimally longer than was actually rendered necessary by the bumping of the taxi.

"This troubled me strangely. I would have liked there to have been no sign of any over-sudden self-giving to remind me that I was in Paris, a city wherein one can imagine anything : education, smartness, distinction, wealth, honesty ; where truth may appear as the outward trappings and remain concealed from the eyes of the most experienced, only, in the end, by many and various means, to emerge as the same monotonous venality. Had I but bent down for a moment and laid my cheek against the velvety cheek that often touched my shoulder, I felt that with a slight movement of the head, I might—first slowly and then suddenly—have reached, unresisted, the turning point in the relationship between a man and a woman. First, almost strangers : afterwards, no longer so. Once a barrier has been broken down, one may gallop through it.

"But that very act would have given me immediate confirmation of the fact that I was involved in a mere commonplace adventure, delicately yet grotesquely concealed beneath a mask. For I certainly should not then have been able to feel that the being beside me, close to me, was as pure as my imagination wished her to be. Why and with what object could she have accepted the company of an unknown man, a sufficiently dangerous proceeding anywhere but especially in Paris ? My friends, when you think about these things, it means you don't do them. I did nothing."

"More fool you !" muttered De Silla. . . .

"Maybe ! But keep quite calm and wait. . . .

"I did nothing, but I did ask her why she had come, and I

asked her suddenly when she was in the middle of an amusing story about Americans in France.

"She replied that she greatly welcomed my question and wished I had asked it before. Had I not done so, she would have been hurt, for that alone would have sufficed to show that I held her in but poor esteem. . . .

"'Look here, Yvonne,' I said excitedly, 'I am a person who comes, goes and leaves no trace. To make fun of me would be but an idle and silly boast. Are you telling me the truth?'

"'Mon ami, regardez-moi, ai-je l'air de mentir? Je le jure. . . . Et à présent voici votre pourquoi : je vous ai vu si gentil avec ce petit garçon abandonné que je vous ai jugé tout de suite. J'ai dit : voilà quelqu'un à qui une femme peut se confier. Et puis j'ai un coup d'œil particulier pour deviner immédiatement avec qui j'ai affaire. . . . Or, c'est inutile de vous dire des choses flatteuses: . . . Ma vie ordinaire est un peu monotone : ces journées exceptionnelles de Paris m'ont grisée, l'idée d'une bonne soirée incognito avec vous incognito quand tout le monde s'amuse m'a souri et j'ai dit mon petit "oui." Et j'en suis très heureuse.'

"This confession was murmured in tones so simple I cannot render them. The phrase most deeply engraved on my mind was : Here is a man whom a woman can trust. How it fanned the flame of the mind ! How it poured cold water on the body ! It aroused a legitimate pride in the responsibility which I felt to have become mine. To all else it put an absolute stop. The situation was now clear. Mademoiselle Yvonne, a young lady of excellent family and good social standing, restricted and constrained in all her activities within the walls of an 'hotel' at Passy or Clichy, had desired to allow herself one evening's enjoyment in her life, and to that end had conveniently chosen the help of an unknown man who inspired her with confidence.

"I remained silent, taken aback. Perhaps the light from the street lamps as we flitted by revealed my expression. Was it thoughtful, troubled, or perplexed ? I do not know.

"'Et bien, qu'est-ce que vous avez, mon ami?' asked the girl with increased interest, taking both my hands in hers.

"'Nothing, my dear : I am forcing myself to play the part of elder brother worthily and I find it very hard. I must confess that after being so long at sea and having had so much of the war it strikes me as very surprising and unusual to find so near a relation here in Paris and so unexpectedly too.'

"'Alors,' she replied sadly, 'j'ai gâté votre soirée. . . . Vous emporterez un mauvais souvenir du Paris de la Victoire.'

"Her words seemed so full of regret that I was overcome with remorse for my stupid masculine egoism and reproached myself again and again for having expressed it so brutally. I do not know what it is that induces man in his inmost self to think that woman must always be considered as the aim and object of sensual desire. After all, the material manifestation is ever the same. It can be found anywhere and everywhere. And even the memory of it soon vanishes. Yet we trample under foot treasures of mind and soul which belong to a few chosen women only. How much more joy can these treasures impart to life than a few hectic semi-conscious moments when some physiological impulse brings physical matter to boiling point. We are not just. In my case injustice was aggravated by ingratitude. It would have been hard indeed to find a more exquisite, tender, sensitive spirit than that which chance had offered me. Though beaten in one direction, the triumphal arch of the soul was still open before me. I could pass beneath it to the accompaniment of life's true music. But, after all, if a man be wise he does the best with what he has . . .

"Hence I was perfectly sincere when I said something gentle to Yvonne. My words soon restored her gaiety and we got out of the taxi without even the shadow of a stain on our characters.

"At the Palais Royal an excellent company was giving a most entertaining comedy. The play was full of witty repartee and double entendre, all harping on the same string. We were not alone in the box, because, as you know, in French theatres seats in the boxes are sold separately. As we had arrived rather

late, we were allotted two back places. Despite the four unknown people who came between us and the stage, Mademoiselle Yvonne greatly enjoyed herself. She laughed quite openly at all the 'risqué' passages, without that hypocritical look of candour which is thought fitting for girls to assume in such circumstances, when men look fixedly at them to see if they can detect any sign of understanding on their faces—a proceeding which seems to please and amuse the girls.

"At one point the principal male character asked the leading lady, who was playing the part of a frivolous little thing, the following rhetorical question : 'Do you know the sources of love ?' To which she replied : 'My good friend, you ask me the impossible ! When you are swept along by a stream, do you ask whence that stream springs ?' At that Mademoiselle Yvonne gave me a side-long glance, and, still keeping her eyes on me, took my hand. She did not smile. Naturally I did not wish to release her hand after that. So with the pressure of our hands we emphasised the phrases in the play which seemed to us applicable to our position. Ah ! would that there had been many more acts, instead of the three we watched pass so quickly before us !

"It was almost midnight as the curtain fell on the last act, but I did not tell her so and she did not enquire the time. When the taxi-driver asked 'where to' I said in a vague way : 'towards the Place de la Concorde.' She did not interfere. We got in and sat close together, neither breaking the silence. Time seemed to me infinitely precious, slipping from my grasp without my being in any way able to stay its course. A few minutes more and then void, desolation, solitude, made the more bitter by the beauty of the vanished dream. How much longer before we got to the Place de la Concorde ? And what then ?

"Yvonne observed me in silence. She seemed to read my every thought. One by one the porticoes of the Rue de Rivoli sped by us, left us. She too seemed to follow their cursed progress with an apprehension that was clearly visible in her eyes. At a certain point, she murmured shyly : 'J'ai soif, mon

ami ; voulez-vous me conduire quelque part prendre une boisson quelconque ?”

“I said : ‘Thank you !’ She smiled and her sparkling teeth and half-closed eyes made the smile divine.

“ ‘C’est moi qui vous remercie.’

“I no longer remember exactly where we stopped, but it was at the door of one of the many night haunts of Paris tucked away in the basement of dark, mysterious-looking buildings.

“We went down a little stairway and then through a padded door, reminiscent of a church. Immediately we found ourselves in a vast chaotic world. Here and there were splashes of gilt. The room was too brightly lit. Over all hung a veil of smoke. The place resounded with wild sounds from even wilder instruments, producing a mad, crazy counter-point. Tiles, small boards, copper and iron plates, bells, earthenware jars hanging on a line beside a couple of niggers who rapped on them with every conceivable kind of stick, added to the convulsive harmony of violins, flutes, ’cellos, double-basses. This heterogeneous hail of sharp, sombre, tinkling, ringing sounds gave the impression that some mad music-lunatics, escaped from their asylum, had taken over the orchestra and were hurriedly giving vent to their madness, urged on by fear lest their guardians might arrive at any moment. Above the players was strung a placard on which was written : ‘Rag-time.’ A hybrid throng of men and women of the usual purple-hued type, whose existence is one of artificially-lighted decay, accompanied the rhythm with shrieks and yells. It was like a group of dervishes, endlessly repeating the same exasperated, evil cry. As everywhere in Paris, at all hours of the day and night, the khaki of American uniforms stood out here and there in great patches of tone. This den, like every other place in Paris, was a centre for animal yells and howls, spasmodic hilarity.

“ ‘Oh !’ gasped Mademoiselle Yvonne in surprise, clinging instinctively to me. But that was all she said. A waitress showed us to a table. At it were already seated two badly made-up, rejected-looking women. They were trying to deal

with a burly American sergeant who looked as if he too had been painted red and orange.

"'No more champagne served now,' we were warned by a waiter, wearing his service ribbon, when we asked for some sort of a drink. And in order to define the position more clearly according to his mentality, he added : "Ten francs a glass.' Without more ado, he then put down in front of us a tray with half a dozen glasses.

"'Allons, courage,' murmured Yvonne, as she took up a glass and began to sip it.

"'Mon loulou,' said one of the painted creatures to the American, as she patted his cap, 'ne regarde pas trop cette dame. . . . Ce n'est pas pour toi . . . tu as ta Bibi et ta Sisi. . . .'

"'How?'

"'Bibi, moi, Sisi celle-là : pas autre dame.'

"'Speak clearly, damn your eyes. . . .'

"'Toi, crétin, qui ne comprend pas Bibi. . . . La dame est à monsieur, tu sais, espèce de pachyderme? . . . ' And turning towards us, she added: 'Faites-moi le plaisir, mes gars, embrassez-vous en plein, pour ôter à cet animal-ci toute envie. . . .'

"Yvonne and I, startled, exchanged looks, seeing first one another's eyes, then mouths. I felt as though my surroundings had vanished, leaving only a dim, tumultuous background. I seemed to be in an unreal world wherein the only sound was the voice of invisible demons close by me.

"'Allons, mes gars, vite, embrassez-vous en plein, sur la bouche et très longuement . . . vous savez comment vous tirer d'affaire, n'est-ce pas?'

"Yes, the voice of demons, full of supreme temptation. . . . Perhaps this too was the reason why that infernal music increased in infernal intensity—for us. The only thing I saw was Yvonne's eyes, gazing into mine. Her pupils were dilated and seemed all the more sparkling for the myriads of tiny gold rays that radiated from them. She breathed quickly ; her mouth was half-open ; a slight tremor came over her thin, quivering lips, wet with champagne. . . .

" 'Faites comme ça,' came the voice of the second painted lady who was sitting opposite us. She stretched out her arms and putting her hands on our necks pushed us together. . . . 'Comme si vous étiez chez-vous . . . allons !'

"I saw Yvonne's eyes draw near, grow bigger, flash, then slowly close as she raised her face and offered me her half-parted lips, which seemed to quiver with pain. . . . For a moment, I felt profoundly chilled, then a warm breath, filled with the exquisite essence of youth and health, approached my lips. I drank it in, smothered it, fused it madly in my own, feverishly caressing the soft fur that lay against my breast. We were two beings merged into one, vibrant, throbbing, forgetful of reason and the world around us, consumed with desire to vanish for ever into that ecstasy.

" 'Pristi ! Qu'ils s'aiment, ces deux-là !' began the voice of the world once more.

"Pale, silent, without looking at one another, we drew apart, overpowered by a sudden malaise that seemed infected with a subtle poison. All around, at the other tables, no one had taken the slightest heed of us. Mechanically we drank another glass of champagne : then perhaps another. Who knows ?

"Yvonne was the first to break the silence. Leaning her forehead on her hand as though it hurt her, she closed her eyes and murmured as if in a dream :

La vie est brève
Un feu de rêve,
Un peu d'amour,
Fini ! Bonjour !

" 'Oui,' she added, 'un feu de rêve et un peu d'amour. . . . C'est comme ça ? . . .' And raising her head, she looked at me.

" 'I don't think so,' I answered curtly, drily. For a few seconds she gazed intently at me, her eyes wide open. She did not speak.

" 'Mais qu'est-ce que vous faites ici ?' came the insistent voice of one of the two painted creatures. 'À votre place je rentrerais chez-moi. . . . Ah ! mademoiselle ! vous êtes

heureuse, vous ! Vous n'avez pas affaire à des crapauds comme ce tipe-ci à khaki. . . . C'est de l'amour, ça, et de bonne marque aussi.'

"I do not know what we stammered in reply, not wishing to appear to have understood the words that came from those horrible lips. I know I felt the place had become a furnace and every living creature reduced to ashes. The smell seemed to make the air unbreathable. It was essential to get out and quickly too.

"We went into the icy night, into the half-deserted haze-enveloped streets. It was one o'clock. As I put back my watch I asked her in a voice which I forced myself to keep natural and calm : 'And now, where would you like me to take you ?'

"Mademoiselle Yvonne stood for a moment with one foot on the running-board of the taxi, thinking. Then in a voice of indifference she said it would be a good plan to go first to my hotel which was near. Then she would continue her way into the void in the same taxi, because at that hour it would be difficult to find another.

"Her proposal was perfectly logical.

" 'Montez, sans regarder le numéro du taxi ni le retenir,' she said with a smile. 'Je vous prie de ne pas suivre mon sillage.'

"Our drive was very short : Rue Castiglione, Place Vendôme, a bit of the Rue de la Paix, Rue des Petits Champs, a few yards of the Boulevard des Capucines and the beginning of Rue Scribe. For me they were feverish moments. Have you ever dreamt that you are being hurled down a steep slope, at the bottom of which you can clearly distinguish the abyss where your body, reduced to a shapeless mass, will soon lie ? Nothing, nothing can stay your fatal fall. In the last flash of conscious thought you can barely measure the intensity of your agony, for already it has become delirium. That was how I felt. When we reached the Rue Scribe and stopped in front of the Grand Hotel I had the sensation of being overcome by paralysis, as though shuddering on the brink of some horrible, inevitable torment.

"All the same I got out of the taxi without apparent hesitation.

" 'Mademoiselle Yvonne,' I said as I took both her hands through the open door, 'I will say little in order to avoid saying much which might seem to you grotesque. In a few minutes I shall be tortured by regrets, but I shall not complain for I owe you unforgettable hours. . . . I do not know whether I have behaved as you wished, but you must realise that I have kept my word to the letter . . . I have asked and I ask nothing of you. And now, Mademoiselle Yvonne, I cannot even say *au revoir*, a word that still allows of hope. *Adieu*. . . .'

"As I spoke her hands lay trembling in mine, contracting feverishly, as phrase succeeded phrase. In the semi-darkness of the taxi I could see the lovely thing sitting motionless in her corner, rigid as if engaged in an inward struggle that demanded all her strength.

"At the final word of separation she remained silent. Then, suddenly, she leant towards me.

" 'Ecoutez,' she said in an unsteady voice, '*c'est moi qui vous demande quelque chose*. . . .'

"She stopped, as though lacking the strength to continue.

" 'Vous partez aujourd'hui même. . . . C'est bien sûr?'

" 'This evening, certainly,' I replied, surprised.

" 'Et bien : je descend. . . .'

"That there might be no doubt as to the definite meaning of the phrase, she freed her hands, flung her arms round me and clung to me, hiding her face on my shoulder.

"I must confess I felt as if a stream of ice-cold water had rushed through my veins. All right, De Silla, don't exclaim, What? You miserable mut? . . . Were you ill? Don't be idiotic. The alternatives were fool or cad.

"Before I could prevent it, Mademoiselle Yvonne had jumped out of the taxi, shut the door and held out some money to the driver, saying abruptly '*Allez !*'

"We were alone in front of the hotel, at that hour deserted and in semi-darkness. We went towards the revolving glass door, beyond which lay the still-lighted hall.

"'Yvonne, I beg you,' I said excitedly, standing still, 'tell me before we go through this door whether I am to consider myself an utter fool who has wasted time over a mere caprice, or whether. . . .'

"'Mon ami, vous employez un langage un peu exagéré pour Paris,' was her reply in evasive and nervous tones, 'quoique ce soit le langage d'un gentilhomme. . . .'

"'No, no, Yvonne, I insist that you give me a definite reply. Heaven alone knows how mortified I feel in having to ask you such a question which may be an atrocious insult or ridiculous nonsense.'

"'Alors,' she replied, looking into my eyes, 'je vous dirai qu'une femme a des réponses à elle que vous ne pourriez pas comprendre. Je pense que nous—pas seulement vous—perdons notre temps.'

"The brazenness of this last phrase was too obviously an effort of will. I told her so.

"'Qu'en savez-vous?' was her reply.

"'Your agitation tells me.'

"'Mais non. . . .' and resolutely she went towards the door which the hotel boy at once set in motion. I followed, repeating her still subtly ambiguous words.

"The hall was full of people as though it were broad daylight. There was a dense coming and going of guests leaving by night trains, porters, waiters, idlers from the bar and hotel lounges. American officers seemed to spring up in all directions. Our passage through this crowd was a matter of indifference to everybody.

"It was impossible for the hotel staff to recognise individually their thousands of clients who were for ever changing. Indeed, they willingly gave up trying to do so. No one stopped you, no one asked you where you were going, nor what you wanted. As though in some public building, the lifts never stopped working, carrying crowds of people up and down between the different floors, where the 'chef d'étage' was too busy to notice who came in or went out of the various rooms and suites. In relation to the confused mass of humanity that

swarmed there, the gaudy splendour and luxury of the hotel seemed excessive. It reminded one of the past when men and things were perfectly equated, when the wave of pleasure-seekers from among the vulgar herd had not yet been swept along by the whirlwind of the war.

"We reached the end of the hall and sat down on one of the sofas placed there for the convenience of guests waiting for the lifts.

"It was then that I noticed an Italian naval lieutenant in uniform get up and come towards me with the satisfied exclamatory 'Oh !' of someone who has been waiting for a long time. It was Santolucci, one of the staff in our Naval Attaché's office at the Embassy.

" 'What's up ?' I asked in surprise.

" 'What's up is that I've been waiting here since midnight to talk to you !'

" 'You have, have you ? And what about ?'

" 'An order which the Admiral, our Naval Attaché, gave me about eleven o'clock to bring you at once. The *H12* instead of going to Plymouth came to Brest. She put in there last night. You have to go to Brest to-night by the two o'clock train via Le Mans and Rennes. As you see, you have only fifty minutes. That's not all. At the station, there's a petty-officer whose orders are to wait for you at the train and give you an urgent despatch from the Ministry to be delivered to the Commander of the cruiser *Libia* now at Brest.'

"I no longer remember what I stammered in reply. Life's talons had seized me again in their cruel grasp, tearing up my dream by its roots, cutting off all further search into the unknown. I glanced at Yvonne and saw an expression of alarm on her face. She did not, however, understand what we were saying, and pretended she had nothing to do with us, partly through innate tact and partly not to bring herself to the notice of my colleague who had not realised she was with me.

" 'Do you know what my orders are from the Admiral ? I am to go with you to the station, so as to assure him that the despatch has been handed over to you and that you have

started and he can wire to Rome to-night that everything has been done. I'll come to your room and help you put your things together. . . . Come along. Here's the lift. . . .'

"I tried to keep calm. . . .

"'All right,' I said, 'but it will be quicker if meanwhile I go to the desk and pay my bill. Otherwise Heaven knows when they'll bring it up. You go up and ask for the key of 231. I'll come in a minute.'

"'Right-o ! I'll wait for you upstairs. But there's no time to lose.'

"'Mon ami, dites-moi la vérité. De quoi s'agit-il ?' Yvonne asked anxiously when I joined her again.

"'The matter is this. I am obliged to go away at once. At once, do you realise ?'

"I myself was surprised at the tone of my voice.

"'Qu'est-ce que vous me dites !' she exclaimed, jumping to her feet.

"'Et vous partez ?'

"My silence answered in the affirmative.

"Her face contracted and her lips moved without making any sound. For a few seconds she stood wrapped in thought, staring at something that did not exist on the floor.

"'Venez ici, Robert,' she finally said. 'Allons, n'importe où, hors de cette foule odieuse.' We went into a small writing-room which was empty and badly-lit and shut the door.

"'Ecoutez, mon ami, je suis sûre que vous avez encore des doutes sur moi. . . . Ce n'est pas ordinaire qu'une demoiselle comme-il-faut dispose de ses nuits à sa pleine liberté. Alors, je vous expliquerai que j'ai dû téléphoner chez-moi à Neilly en assurant que je passerais la nuit chez ma tante, ce qui m'arrive très souvent quand je suis en retard pour mes commissions en ville. . . . Je ne peux plus vous prouver combien je me suis attachée à vous dans les quelques heures que nous avons passé ensemble. J'aurai voulu vous rendre heureux et disparaître de votre vie pour prendre place dans votre souvenir—ce qui vaut encore mieux. . . . Il ne me reste plus qu'un moyen pour vous prouver cela et vous faire

un *autre* suprême cadeau. . . . Je vous confie *encore* mon honneur : je m'appelle Yvonne — et mon père est un des plus éminents personnages dans le monde de la banque. Vous pouvez vous informer. Ne me regardez-pas comme ça. Je suis tout-a-fait équilibrée. Et à présent ne me dites pas même votre nom et où vous allez, à fin que vous ne pensiez pas à un accrochage à mariage à travers une correspondance à initier demain. De votre côté ne m'écrivez-pas. Fini—comme finit ma petite chanson d'antan . .

.
Un peu d'espoir,
Fin! Bonsoir !

Robert, chéri d'une demi-journée de Paris, embrassez-moi . . . fort. . . . Encore . . . je vous aime, adieu. . . .'

"I found myself alone, dazed, overcome by the foolish desire to do myself some bodily hurt After that I remember vaguely the lift, the room, the station, my troubled sleep in the train, the painful discrepancy between dream and reality. . . .

"When I got to Brest. . . ."

"Excuse me, sir," said a sailor who appeared at the door of the ward-room. "Mr. Romero, it's twelve o'clock and your watch. . . ."

"Right. Just coming. . . ."

"No, no, wait a minute," begged several voices. "What happened then? When you got to Brest? . . ."

"Nothing happened. That's all. At Brest I went on board the H12 and for two or three days I could not believe I was back in my usual war world. I seemed to be right outside it. . . . Then we sailed for Gibraltar and had the most terrible weather. In fact I had a kind of second professional baptism. . . . Then, even now, but that has nothing to do with you. . . ."

Romero got up, crossed the ward-room, zig-zagging because of the ship's roll.

"Look here," shouted De Silla after him, "unless you've been telling us a whole string of fables to flatter your vanity,

why don't you marry her? You'd have everything : beauty, wit, distinction, 'banque' and above all 'honneur' . . . lots of 'honneur'"

"There you go again ! You've all got a passion for reducing the beautiful things of this world to the common denominator of marriage," muttered Romero as he clung to the door in order to avoid being thrown by the ship's sudden tossing. His laughter echoed in the bulwarks, then died away among the hammocks of the men asleep

(From "Eva Marina." Milano, Mondadori, Publishers.)



FRANCESCO CHIESA

(-)



THE CHERRIES

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

OF all the fruits of the year there were none at which we boys gazed with such longing eyes, and which made our mouths water, so much as the cherries. . . . But this is a poor and inadequate way of putting it. It was not merely greediness which made those beautiful things, waving, rosy and black, from the tops of the branches in the golden June sunlight, appear to be beckoning to us. How many equally good things there were, which aroused in us only a reasonable and moderate appetite !

These great shining round eyes of red and purple smiled at us from amidst the foliage with such a bewitching expression that I defy anyone to tell me that he'd have resisted them, that he'd have remembered the duty of respecting the belongings of other people, a duty which the priest, our school-master, our parents and our lesson-books so often repeated to us !

The only thought which could hold us somewhat in check was that of those brutes of landlords, always ready with a cudgel, or even with a gun. And also those horrible bundles of thorns, tied all round the trunk of the tree where the branches begin.

After gazing at them for a long time, we flung ourselves into the woods, to search among chestnuts and oaks for those wild cherry-trees, as tall and lean as Virtue, which, however, do have some boughs here and there sprinkled with red berries.

Small berries, nothing but stone, but full of a tart little flavour, or else a rather pleasant bitterness, or else, if they are reached at the right moment, before the blackbirds and the ants, they have a sharp sweetness.

We, the biggest boys, climbed up and up, till we were under the blue sky. The smallest ones, tiresome little snivellers, who had no means of heaving themselves off their feet, crowded below, with their faces turned upwards, whining: 'Throw some down ! Throw some down !' And we would answer : "Here ! Here !" letting fall a withered branch, or three stripped cherrystones.

At last the day came when, by ransacking all the woods in the neighbourhood, it was no more possible to find cherries than grains of gold in the river-bed. And we slouched back through the fields and vineyards, ogling with an indescribable longing those beautiful hard cherries which are the last to ripen, and which are plump and goodly enough to make one weep with rage.

One day, which had proved as unprofitable as usual, I was returning alone through the fields. The whole afternoon had been spent in clambering into the most impossible summits of those miserable sterile trees. I was returning dog-tired, with a dry mouth and empty hands, and with a number of holes in my brèeches.

And behold ! a step in front of me, right on the very edge of the path, the most wonderful cherry tree in the whole world.

Heavens ! What a marvel ! What bunches of delight hanging from every smallest twig ! What a dangling in the evening breeze ! What a glitter in the glow of the sunset ! *Dio Mio* ! What large drops of Paradise !

And up I went, without further reflection. There was no need for me to stretch, so great was the abundance even on the easiest branches. But having satisfied the first craving I began to think of the peril in which I had placed myself. I already began to wish myself down again. Through the leaves I could see a bit of the roof of my home, and I greatly envied my brothers, who were there in tranquillity.

I had to extricate myself then, as quickly as possible. Not, however, until I had supplied myself well, for one should know how to compensate great dangers with sufficient reward. But I had only one pocket ; my mother had sewn up all the others, so that she might not always see them bulging with all sorts of objects : cord, nails, stones, cypress cones. One pocket is not much. So I began to put some handfuls of cherries into the front of my shirt, next to my naked skin, feeling myself shiver agreeably at the contact of that smooth coldness.

But suddenly, a very different chill ran through me from head to foot. Someone was coming. . . . "I must stay where I am, *perdio* !" I thought to myself, "I must hold my breath . . . let him pass. . . ." But there was more than one ; they were talking.

They were speaking in an undertone, but nevertheless I could not avoid hearing. Then there was the noise of footsteps, then nothing. They had stopped, the wretched people ! They had seated themselves right under my tree !

I stretched my neck a little, to peer between the leaves. There were a man and a girl. They were holding hands ; they were saying the usual things into each other's ears. And curiosity, the lively impudent curiosity of us boys, swept every fear away from me.

It was already nearly dark, and hard to see. Stretching out further and further, I came to press my chest against a branch, and I began to feel the juice of my cherries running down my stomach and legs. I gave vent to my feelings aloud.

The girl clung to the young man :

"Did you hear ? Did you hear that ?"

He turned his head here and there as if groping to see.

"No !" he said. "It's nothing." And he put his arm round her neck. I was beginning to enjoy myself in earnest. For see what a thing is Man ! (These, you must understand, are reflections which I make to-day.) I found myself in a cherry-tree which did not belong to me, under the risk of being discovered and treated as I deserved, with the certainty of a

bad reception at home, because of the lateness of the hour, because of my tattered breeches, and because of that horrible stew on my chest. And yet these sad thoughts still left sufficient room in my mind for merriment to have its frolicsome way.

I broke a dry twig ; and at the sudden *tic* the girl started up as though she had been touched by an electric current. (A simile which occurs to me at the present moment, of course ! at that time I did not even know that there was such a thing as electricity in the world.) The youth also showed some signs of uneasiness.

"It must be a dormouse," he said, looking up.

I continued my little game for a good time, improving it by degrees. Gentle little muffled cries like the squeaking of an owl, barely audible, so that one could hardly say from whence they came. . . . Cherry-stones pressed between thumb and forefinger and snicked a short way with that delightful violence which is known to everyone. And *tic* on the stones of the footpath ; and *tac* on the cabbages in the field. . . . And if they looked in one direction, *tic tac* on the opposite side.

"No, really !" he said ; "but it must be a cricket ! . . . It must be a drop of rain !"

Yes, precisely, it must be rain ! Not a cloud, by all that's holy ! And the stars began to twinkle through the gaps, large and small, in my hiding-place.

"I am going !" proclaimed the girl firmly.

Were they ? Weren't they ? . . . and off they went.

Auff ! it was high time. As soon as they were at a little distance I hurled after them the best owl-call that had ever issued from my throat. "Tu-witt ! Tu-witt !" and let myself slide down the trunk, and away into the fields.

As pleased as Punch, notwithstanding that which awaited me. Pleased, who knows why, because I had frightened a pair of lovers.

(From "Racconti Puerili." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)



AMALIA GUGLIELMINETTI

(-)



A MAN OF COURAGE

(Translated by GRACE JELF)

FEDERICO ZIRLI, the artist, had already twice been called a man of courage, although he was the mildest and most retiring soul that ever appeared in the garb of a painter of canvases.

The first time, he was fishing with a rod on the banks of a canal ; his box of colours was lying on the grass unopened, close to the little fishing-basket which was empty. Suddenly the water became disturbed, and he was obliged to admit that a man had fallen in, especially as a filthy hand emerged, and waved in the air as if imploring assistance.

Then Federico Zirli jumped into the water, fully clothed, swam to the drowning man, and brought him to the bank unconscious. People ran up from the pasture lands near by, and recognised the unfortunate creature as a foolish beggar, who had been tramping in the neighbourhood.

"I should have done better to have let him drown," observed his rescuer. Then he borrowed the dry clothes of a countryman, so that he might return home.

The second time, Federico Zirli was walking down a country road in the rain, smoking his pipe, and talking to himself on the subject of the wet weather.

Suddenly he heard a wild and rapid noise of galloping. He stopped, and saw advancing towards him, from the bend in the road, a smart little trap, drawn by an English pony, which was going at a furious pace, foaming at the mouth, and its eyes protruding from their sockets. The temper and mettle of the little horse were beautiful to see.

Two people, closely buttoned up in waterproofs, with hoods over their eyes, clung, shrieking, to the reins, and were flung this way and that, according to the erratic motion of the course they made.

Federico Zirli stood out in front of the frantic animal, barred its way, seized it by the snaffle with a firm hand, and throwing the whole weight of his body against it, compelled it to come to a standstill. It began to rain in torrents, and the cold shower helped to quieten the pony, which was already tired, so that after a minute it resumed its light trot and went off. In the meantime the two hooded persons thanked their preserver effusively, and the few spectators applauded his feat.

The next day the papers gave a brief report of the incident, under the heading : "A Man of Courage," and added that, although no one would be surprised to hear of the valour and presence of mind of Federico Zirli, the artist, who was already known for other brave deeds, it was nevertheless a remarkable thing that the two people he had saved should have remained anonymous, and should have been able to vanish like a couple of mysterious shades, without even attempting to show their gratitude.

But Zirli, smoking his pipe in front of his easel, which held a still blank canvas, shrugged his shoulders when he read it, and murmured : "What an exaggeration !" And for some time he smiled as he thought of it. Then days and months passed, and he forgot all about the affair ; neither did the Fates grant him an opportunity of effecting another rescue, nor even enable him to paint an immortal picture.

He was therefore living in the most complete serenity, when, one morning, he received a black-edged letter, in which the Contessina Giselda di Fuscaldo—a name hitherto completely unknown to him—enquired very courteously whether he would undertake the work of restoring the family picture-gallery in Fuscaldo Castle, and went on to say that, in the hope that he would do so, she would expect him the next day at the aforesaid Castle, which stood at the distance of a few miles from the city.

Full of curiosity, but not surprised, for, being a good philosopher, Federico Zirli was never surprised by anything, he had himself conveyed next morning to Fuscaldo, where he was conducted into an ancient building of various superimposed styles of architecture, which was called a castle on account of its formidable appearance. After crossing courtyards, and going up staircases and along passages, he reached a baroque drawing-room, in which a tall fair young lady, dressed in mourning, was sitting by a window, reading. As he entered the room she rose with a welcoming smile, and said in a melodious voice :

"You will certainly have been surprised that I should have asked you here without knowing you personally, but I have long known and admired your work, and I have a great regard for your talent. Shall we go to have a look at the gallery?"

Federico bowed in silence, and obediently followed her, until they reached a long and rather dim corridor, where there were ranged on the wall warriors and cardinals, nuns and great ladies, magistrates in togas, and officers in uniform.

"This is the latest one : my father," she said indicating a long oval picture, out of which an old gentleman in a dress-coat and a fur cape gazed haughtily in front of him, through the glass of his monocle.

"Poor Papa !" she added with a sigh ; "six months ago he was still walking about here, hale and well ; a heart attack deprived him of life in a few hours."

"You are in mourning for your father?" asked Federico in a subdued voice, and with an expression suited to the occasion.

"Exactly," replied Giselda di Fuscaldo, and was silent for a moment, but then she roused herself and smiled, as though life recalled her from such sad thoughts to more immediate realities.

"Listen, Master," she said to Zirli, who bowed with an expression of outraged modesty, quite overcome by this flattering title, "Do you think it will take a long time to complete the work?"

"The portraits are nearly all in bad condition," replied Federico, examining them closely. "They will have to be sent to me at my studio, one or two at a time, and I will try to restore them as quickly as I can."

"No, no," murmured Giselda, reflecting, "I want everything to be in order in less than a month, and in that way too much time would be lost. I must pray you, instead, to accept my hospitality for a few weeks. You would then be able to work in peace, in a quiet healthy place, with an enchanting view, and you would have a discreet companion, of whom, I hope, you would not have cause to complain."

"The invitation is very tempting," replied Federico, perplexed, "And it would be flattering to a far more important person than a poor artist, such as I am."

"Then you accept? Do not say no!"

"I could not refuse such a gracious offer. Will you tell me when I am to begin."

"Whenever you please, my dear Master, to-morrow, or the day after to-morrow, if you like."

"Very well, we will fix the day after to-morrow for the beginning of my work. I shall come here to-morrow, with bag and baggage, resolved to remain here until you turn me out."

They both laughed, and felt that they had been drawn nearer to each other by this brief conversation, and by the invitation which had been given with so much enthusiasm and accepted with so much joy; and as Federico returned towards evening to his studio, in the Fuscaldò car, he thought to himself that even a philosopher must sometimes wonder at the splendid surprises of destiny, and must admit that the scene may change very suddenly in the life of any individual. Who in the world would have said, the previous morning, that such a stroke of fortune was awaiting him: a month's sojourn in a luxurious castle, enjoying the hospitality of a charming creature who esteemed him, who called him Master, who, out of sheer admiration for his work and his talent, had sought him out, that she might entrust him with the very delicate task of renovating her ancestors.

He spent the next day in setting his things in order, replenishing his stock of colours and brushes, and disconsolately reviewing his restricted wardrobe, so as to make a careful selection from it. He added some books and photographs to his luggage, and just as he was leaving he bought a bunch of flowers, so that he might appear before his hostess in a becoming manner.

Giselda, clad in a gown with black and white draperies, was awaiting him in the courtyard of the castle, and playing with a lithe greyhound which had a smooth streaky coat. Federico Zirli had stopped to gaze admiringly at the picturesque grace of this group, when she turned round and saw him, standing upright against the wall, with the bunch of flowers in his hand, looking so comic in his light-coloured overcoat and travelling-cap that she ran towards him laughing like a child.

"Oh, well done, Master ! I have been waiting impatiently for your arrival. And you have brought me those flowers. How charming of you ! I will show you to your room."

And, running ahead of him, by courtyards, staircases and passages, she brought him to a large room in a corner of the building, filled with massive old furniture, and which opened on to a marble terrace from whence the most enchanting landscape could be seen.

"Do you like your room, dear Master ?" she asked him, while the footman was bringing up the luggage, and Federico hardly knew how to reply, so much was he moved by the sweet beauty of nature, and by the gracious courtesy of his hostess. She had his easel, pallet and box of colours placed in a covered verandah, where the light was intensely clear and evenly diffused, and where no sound could reach him but the songs of the vintagers and the rustling of the wind in the forest near at hand.

Federico Zirli began to paint with unwonted ardour, only regretting that the work of restoration did not allow him to express himself spontaneously and fervently in an original creation, which should reveal his renewed fever of activity

and enthusiasm for art. He thought of the Contessina Giselda di Fuscaldo, as he had seen her playing with a greyhound, and it seemed to him that from that subject he would have known how to obtain the most amazing effects of charm and grace.

But in the meantime he repainted the red of a Cardinal's hat, or repaired the Medici collar of a crabbed-looking matron, and would start when Giselda's light step and fresh young voice rang in the adjacent gallery.

"Master, would you care to take a few steps in the garden ? Master, will you come down to the hall, to have a cup of tea ? Master, the car is waiting for us ; come with me, and set aside your work."

She did not leave him in peace for a moment. She seemed to delight in seeing his confusion, and in the ingenuous excuses, with which he sought to avoid neglecting the work which he had set about with so much ardour, and which he considered as a duty. But in this Giselda seemed to take very little interest, and she would hardly stop in front of the restored canvas, giving an abstracted nod of approval when the painter asked her with scrupulous insistence whether she were satisfied with his efforts.

Sometimes he felt humiliated, and out of patience, and as he could not understand the motive of an unknown lady in showing such hospitality and kindness to an unknown man, he sought for some reason extraneous to his art ; for it seemed as if his hostess had summoned him to her presence, not so much to avail herself of his ability as a painter, as to have his companionship at table and for walks in the country.

But how in the world could such an adorable creature take pleasure in letting herself be seen in the company of an unpolished and clumsy bear such as he ? Did there not exist other painters just as skilful as he, and far more attractive ? Or perhaps she had chosen him precisely because he was lacking in physical qualities, well knowing that he could not deceive himself, and misinterpret her expansive kindness.

Federico tormented himself night and day over such

questionings, and these weeks spent in the country, in a castle which had seemed to be enchanted, in the company of that girl who might be taken for a changeling, were embittered for him by suspicious thoughts and by miserable perplexity. His work no longer went forward with so much alacrity and confidence as at first, and all too often he caught himself listening idly to the songs of the vintagers, and the rustling of the wind. And if Giselda were to come in unexpectedly, laughing at his dreamy expression, he would feel his heart failing him, as though it were under too great a pressure.

"Alas ! I must be in love," he reflected, as he smoked on the terrace, on one of the last days of his stay at the Castle of Fuscaldo. And he thought joyfully, and at the same time with melancholy, that soon he would be free once more, master of himself and of his own will, no longer in the chains of this luxurious bondage, which made him weak and foolish as a child. Fortunately the evil was at an early stage, and in the severe solitude of his work it would not take long to cure ; but woe ! if this weakness of thought and action, woe ! if these alluring temptations had taken hold of him for too long a space of time !

Now the ancestors of Giselda di Fuscaldo were repainted in all their glory, and the humble restorer might go away in peace.

"Master." The high-pitched voice of his hostess sounded from the garden ; and when he leaned out over the balustrade and looked down, she shouted to him :

"You see that black car over there, coming this way, along that white road ?"

"Yes, I see it," shouted Federico in turn.

"Well, in that car there is someone who knows you."

"You are joking, Contessina."

"No, I am not joking, I am telling you the most sober truth, you will soon be convinced of it."

The painter shrugged his shoulders, and slowly re-entered the room, asking himself what new system of exquisite torment she had now invented for him.

But half an hour later he was startled by Giselda's voice, even more high-pitched and ringing than usual :

"Here I am, my dear Master, and this time I am not alone."

She entered arm in arm with an unknown young gentleman, who smilingly held out both his hands, and exclaimed with extraordinary effusion :

"Thank you, thank you, my dear Master ; Giselda and I owe our lives to you."

"Excuse me, my dear sir, I don't quite understand what you mean," stammered Federico Zirli, disconcerted, and he looked at Giselda, who was smiling mischievously.

"But how is this ?" asked the other, perplexed, "Doesn't the Master know, then ?"

"He doesn't know ! He doesn't know !" cried Giselda very gaily, highly entertained by their confusion : "But first of all let us proceed to the introductions : Lieutenant Roberto Lusignano, my cousin, and now my fiancée ; the artist Federico Zirli, called the Man of Courage."

"Now you understand, don't you ?" added Roberto Lusignano. "My cousin and I are the two unknown people, the two anonymous and mysterious individuals who one day last April, when we happened to be going full tilt down a country road in my trap, ran a very serious risk of being overturned, and of injuring, as the doctors say, some important organ, through the fault of the horse, which was having a fit of freakishness. Fortunately for us, a man of courage, who was passing at that moment, seized the animal by the snaffle, and with admirable strength and presence of mind succeeded in bringing him to a standstill."

"And if we vanished like a couple of shades," continued Giselda, "it was certainly not out of ingratitude, but because I ought not to have been out driving with my cousin, that particular day, but at my English lesson."

"Besides which," Roberto Lusignano frankly concluded, "my respected cousin, Count Fuscaldo, detested me with all the might of his very blue blood, and refused me the hand of

his daughter, whom I loved, and who loved me. I don't know what would have happened if the papers had published our two names, associated in the same accident. Now, my uncle is dead, and peace be to his soul ! As soon as ever Giselda is out of mourning she is to be my wife, but in the meantime, having taken counsel with me, she wished to welcome and entertain and make the acquaintance of our rescuer, although owing to some extraordinary caprice of her own, she has hidden it all from you till this moment. And that is all."

Federico listened in silence, pulling his beard, as if to squeeze out of it some thought less bitter than that which rose to his lips ; and the bitter thought was this :

"So I have saved your lives, and you in return for this service have asked me to repaint your ancestors. Oh ! if only, as a reward, you had left me in the illusion that all this had been done out of sheer admiration for the artist, out of pure esteem for that little which I am worth, and out of sympathy and goodwill ! Why therefore, did you not tell me this at once, honestly, even brutally ? Why embitter these last days for me ? Why show me your gratitude by such genteel charity ? This time, too, I made a mistake in effecting a rescue."

As he was thinking this, Roberto Lusignano said to him : "Dear Federico, we must be friends, and call each other '*tu*.' "

"Yes, of course, my dear Roberto," exclaimed the painter, immediately embracing him. "First, however, grant me the favour that I am going to ask of you ; it is not much."

"Whatever you wish, my friend," replied Roberto, smiling, "even to kiss my fiancée."

Federico Zirli grew rather pale, and did not reply at once, but as soon as he was able to speak he said simply :

"Let me go away, this very evening."

And his face expressed such sorrowful resolution, that the other two gazed at him without comprehending, and did not know how to oppose him.

(From "*Anime allo Specchio*." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

ADA NEGRI

(-)



(I)

THE SERVANT

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

FROM the grey asthmatic miserable nuptials of a town dustman—more dirty than the road sweepings which he collected at suburban street corners—with a sempstress who had half ruined her eyesight at her needle, there was born, one day, a little girl. She was neither wanted nor loved but accepted passively like the poverty which emptied of their blood the veins of the woman who was still young, and bent earthwards the body of the man who was not yet old.

This daughter of two weaklings was born ugly and grew up ugly. At twelve years old, squat and plain, with oblique Japanese eyes aglow with goodness in a face seeming roughly hewn out of stone, she already did all the work of the humble house. She stripped and made the big bed and her own couch, which looked like a place where a dog would sleep ; she washed her father's ragged clothes in a tub ; she watched with affectionate activity and thoughtful tenderness the premature failing of her mother, who, though she was not yet forty, was white-haired and almost blind after her long years at the needle, and who was indifferent to everything except the stabbing pains of arthritis which made her cry out in anguish.

Her mother died, peacefully, one November dawn when the world was wrapped in mist. A few months later her father succumbed to heart failure. They died as animals and the poor are wont to do, without noise and without trace. Anin was at that time fifteen years old. She gathered together the

few things she possessed, sold the big bed and the chest for a ridiculous price, put her mother's gilt ring on her finger, and went out to service.

Against the dark background of tireless work there began to show up the true form of Anin's life.

She had received as her birthright the gift of joyous obedience. She was born a servant, as one is born a painter, a poet, a man of business or a thief. Submission, devotion, patience, serenity in the midst of weariness were the essentials of that humble but perfect and magnificent human type.

She soon learned, under the rule of a meticulous and despotic mistress, the most delicate, difficult and rough duties of a middle-class household. How to wield the *galera* (the heavy brush used for parquet floors) without knocking it against chair legs or corners of the furniture ; how to cook both artistically and economically ; how to iron without making the linen yellow ; how to polish plates and glasses till they shone, and not to chip them ; how to make brass handles and locks shine like gold, without listening at the key-hole ; how to chase the dust from every ornament, from every corner, from every hiding place in the house as if it were a mortal enemy, and never grow tired of repeating the same lunatic and empty gestures.

She quickly learnt, moreover, four important rules. When a dress is threadbare at the seams and the colour has all faded, you give it to the maid. When fruit begins to go bad, you make haste and let the servant have it. However worn out the servant may be with the incessant work of a whole day, she must stay up till midnight in a corner of the kitchen until her master and mistress come back from the theatre. While in the dining-room and the drawing-room the company talks, the maid must remain quiet and silent in her lonely place by the stove, turning down the gas so as not to be wasteful. These things did not weigh on her or make her suffer. It was natural to her. She could not have done otherwise. Hers was an obedient nature, but not arid or mute. She cherished within herself a humble but irresistible need of

loving. Her clear little Japanese eyes shone with a bright ray of affection for everything and everybody ; for her cross mistress, for her surly and exacting master, for the fat friend who came to supper every evening and never tipped her a penny ; for the baker and the milkman ; for the shoes which she polished with enthusiasm ; for the pots which she made shine like the sun, washing and rubbing them so much ; for the tabby cat ; for the kitchen window where she had put a poor little cineraria in a tin, hoping that it would flower.

Those exotic eyes of hers, gay and ingenuous as they were, made her almost handsome in spite of her clumsy figure, the tiny plait of rust-coloured hair coiled, without a trace of variety, in a tight knot at her neck, her face clumsily cut in reddish granite.

Time passed, slow and monotonous. Anin was now a woman of thirty-five, sinewy and hairy as a porter. In the household she had assumed the importance, unacknowledged but absolute, of the air one breathes, the water one drinks, the floor where one walks. In her simple blue striped linen dress with her noiseless felt slippers she was everywhere, did everything, turned her hand to no matter what task. Yet she was still the Anin, who, in the evening eclipsed herself as you please, and went to her kitchen to iron socks or mend dusters and sheets.

She had never thought of getting married. In any case, no man had ever looked at her with emotion or meaning, as other women are looked at. She was of those who keep on the margin of life, unconscious of the fact of sex, for no languors or disquiet has ever told them of it ; who emit none of that charm which in many ugly women is more potent than in the handsome ones. Her tireless activity sufficed her. She was born to be a servant.

When came the marriage of her employers' daughter Liana—a fragile diaphanous creature like an alabaster lamp where burns a flame, with the face too long and the eyes too immobile and the clear ecstatic profile of a fourteenth century madonna—everyone thought it quite natural that Anin, the faithful servant, should go with her. Liana had never learnt

the art of commanding : she was a silent girl, who remained for hours at a time dreaming alone ; she started at every sudden noise, turned pale at a word of unaccustomed harshness. Daughter of two despots, she herself was without will. The engineer Carmi, he, so resolute and enterprising, had chosen her for that very reason ; for the mystery of that fragility which made her so precious, so impenetrable and almost equivocal ; for the words hidden in her heart which she would never have dared to utter.

Anin worshipped her. She had been present at her birth. She had helped her to grow up, watched over her when she was ill, petted her when she was sad. The marriage of Liana was, in a certain sense, Anin's marriage too.

The furniture, the carpets, the curtains, the ornaments of the joyful new house became to the worthy servant the object of a kind of fetishism.

It never occurred to her that these gracious possessions might have been her own, had fate but been kinder to her. To be called to be the guardian of so much beauty exalted her like some noble mission. To polish them, to set them out, to re-arrange them was equivalent, in her simple soul, to possessing them. Her sense of ownership, which was very vague, united dimly her mother's worm-eaten chest, sold for a few shillings, with the massive bridal furniture of carved oak, with the great ebony bedstead which she dusted every morning with her own careful hands, plying the feather brush, the duster and the broom.

As the years passed she became stouter and more bent, growing heavier as she filled out. But when she placed a stool under the feet of her languid mistress, no one else could have shown such delicacy of gesture. By intuition and love she had come to understand the mute wishes of her master and mistress from a sign, the turn of their heads, the movement of an eyelid, a sudden silence. The engineer, who had fits of temper like a July storm which rumbles, thunders and lightens and then leaves the sky clearer than before, dominated his rage more quickly before a submissive and judicious

word from Anin than before the trembling pallor, the silent genuflexion, the moral nullity of his wife.

Liana Carmi, having with much suffering brought into the world a poor simulacrum of a child, dead before it was born, fell a victim to a wasting sickness which made her transparent as wax, kept her for long months in bed or on a couch, with periodic heart attacks during which she suffered the agonies of death while she yet lived. During this time of trouble Anin forgot sleep and fatigue and hunger. She was an indescribably devoted nurse, though, with amazing tact, she never departed from her unassuming position as servant. Her big hands, rough from the broom handle, cracked by soda and boiling water, had nevertheless when they moved the invalid, arranged her sheets, shook up her pillows or offered her medicine, a gentleness and lightness of touch as if they had been the hands of a spirit.

Jealous of the interference of any outside sister or nurse, Anin wanted to cure her mistress herself. And her mistress did get well ; but she was still like a flower given into the care of Anin, like a child who had to be tucked up in bed every night, while the words " Good-night, little mistress," were murmured with such infinite tenderness as warms the hearts of mothers.

As she grew old, she became almost bald, but she would not think of wearing a wig. Her bare head of an oily yellow, covered only at the nape of her neck with a tight knot of greyish hair, was more grotesque than ever, with its yellowish pimpled cheeks, its slanting eyes sparkling with gay benevolence, its flat nose a little swollen with libations—for one fault she must needs have, poor Anin, and hers was a fondness for wine. She was never drunk. When she was a little, oh, only a very little merry, she used to dance a ridiculous irresistible fandango, singing a little song in a dialect that was half French and half Piedmontese, finishing with a pirouette and a refrain " Oh la, vive la galette !"

An old country house inherited by the engineer Carmi on the death of his mother—a peaceful rustic retreat, with the

mountains of Biella at its shoulders and the vast sloping plain in front—was the delight of Anin's last years. The family went there to spend the summer and the autumn in quietness. The house had walls washed white with chalk, red brick floors, wooden balconies, a well in the courtyard, a great room full of Indian corn, of sieves and baskets, a pergola all grown over with a grape-vine which sent its tendrils in at the windows. The servant's simple heart was marvellously in harmony with this simple house where coloured pictures of the Sacred Heart and of Our Lady hung, above a little branch of olive, at the heads of the four-post bedsteads, where the antique cupboards were worm-eaten, and a perfume of old domestic lares winged its way through the rooms whose walls retained the bitter-sweet smell of quinces.

She herself was a domestic spirit, serene and benevolent. In the village (a rude hamlet where labourers and spinners lived) she enjoyed an undisputed authority : people came to her for advice and called her when they were in trouble. No poor man ever knocked in vain on the door of which she was the humble but powerful guardian. Anin gave ample alms of bread, oil, flour, which belonged naturally to her master, becoming confused in her sense of ownership in spite of her evangelical holiness of intention.

At seventy-eight, still active and ready, up at five in the morning, not in bed till eleven at night, she asked of God one favour alone ; that she might not linger on in an infirm old age and be a burden to her master and mistress, but be struck down suddenly by the kind hand of death, quickly, at her post of duty. God heard her prayer.

One afternoon of great heat, in the low smoky kitchen where a few flies were humming, the old woman sat on the bench by the spent fire, knitting. She had finished washing, scrubbing and sprinkling the floor, she had put all the plates in order on the wooden rack, filled the shining pails with water. The master and mistress were resting in an upstairs room ; a great silence covered the house, which seemed deserted.

Soothed by the click of her needles, Anin looked with tired

eyes at the outline and harmony of the objects which she loved ; the pleasant brown walls the pewter three-branched candlestick on the chimney-piece, the branch of laurel over the door, the distaff and spinning-wheel in a corner, kept in memory of the dead housewife. The glass door opening on to the porch gathered from the distance a vision of infinite peace, a sea of green in three shades, the rich shining green of the chestnut trees, the yellow-green of the walnuts, the grey-green of the birches, down, down, slipping away in waves, until earth and sky mingled in a bluish cloud.

"Washing-day to-morrow," she thought, more with an instinct than with her mind, "Get up at four—count the clothes—give the soap to the washerwomen—but the soap, where is that soap? How hot it is to-day, how oppressive! That soap——?"

The fragile thread of thought broke in her brain, her hands fell, clasped, in her lap, her face, livid and twisted, bent towards her left shoulder. Thus she remained, turned to stone in a tragic ugliness, which the majesty of death made solemn.

There died, in her, the last servant worthy of the name. Indeed she was the last to bear the title *servant* in its most beautiful, most human meaning, of voluntary submission, of watchful serenity, of obscure but necessary toil accomplished with the ardour of a vocation, with the organic joy of one in perfect harmony with her destiny.

The bench on which she grew stiff in her last sleep still bears her shade, invisible but present ; the tutelary spirit of simple things and simple affections which no one understands any more.

Over her grave in the tranquil mountain churchyard nothing grows except grass. But Anin is content, for she in her lifetime was like the grass, bent beneath the footsteps of others but always renewed with generous growth, asking for nothing but sun and rain, existing only to be a tireless offering of coolness, of freshness, of repose.

(From "Le Solitarie." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

THE PROMISE

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

THEY were both sitting outside on the sacks of rags piled against the walls of the dye-works at the side of the factory. There was deep sadness in Fresia's eyes, slow faithful eyes like those of a dog. There was a cold and resolute firmness in all Marcus' set hard face which revealed acquisitiveness and tenacity in the shape of the bones showing under the dry skin. Gaudy rags, ravelled bits of stuff of every colour oozed out of the top and the rents of the sacks.

An asphyxiating odour of dust emanated from them, mingling with the bitter smell of acid from the dye-works. The factory, empty of its workpeople, was silent for the midday break. But the air was full of the amazement of that silence, a sense and vibration of waiting, as if in that iron country it was impossible to exist without the noise, the panting of machinery in motion.

Greyish smoke passed ever and again across the sun, taking uncouth shapes, dispersing, gathering together again, changing the aspect of the mountain and of the torrent according to the alteration of light and shade.

Fresia said for the tenth time :

"Are you really going away?"

And Marcus, for the tenth time, answered, "The boat weighs anchor on Friday from Genoa."

The girl's dog-like eyes grew wet and glazed, with a look of fear.

"There are twelve of us going from about here. Gianni di Fontanella and Paolo della Guercia, you know, the stoker from the new factory, are coming too. But you don't think I'm going to America just to be a wretched workman as I am

here, do you ? Not much. I've had my schooling, and taken three courses at the evening classes. I don't know English, but I'll soon learn. The thing is to begin right at the bottom, in a small way. Then—leave the rest to me. You can read in the papers every day about self-made men who have built up colossal fortunes ; and they were bootblacks or shop hands or bank clerks. I mean to get rich, do you hear ? I shan't rest till then. Gosh, a man is not only born a capitalist, he becomes one."

He lowered his voice a little, turning his head towards his employer's house which backed on to the left side of the factory, and whence came a gay clashing of dishes.

"Do you think he, for instance, was born rich ? He made his own fortune, penny by penny, yard by yard. Now I touch my cap to him as he goes by and say 'Sir,' and I thank him at the end of the week when he shoves me across the pay desk an envelope with my money in all ready. Well, cheer up, Fresia ! In fifteen or twenty years when I come back again I shall call him ' old boy ' and ask him if his factory is for sale."

In all this speech the only thing that the girl had understood was "in fifteen or twenty years." Her lips trembled. She put out her hand timidly to press his hard knotted hand with its large brownish flat finger-nails. He answered her caress, but continued his train of thought.

"My Socialist pals. Yes. Committees, chairmen, propaganda, demonstrations, strikes, the devil to pay, nothing but gestures and shouting. And in the end what do you get ? An extra shilling or two a day. Yes. I thought of being a Socialist at one time. But what do you get out of it ? What are another couple of shillings a day ? You are poor devils the whole of your life all the same. Of course there is the union. But does it put anything in your pocket ? A man has to make his way alone, must be sound, not be afraid, make bargains, get on with his fists and his elbows ; he must be alone and do as he likes. He must not be afraid of anything, nor of the means he employs nor of his enemies."

"What shall I do while you are away ?"

"You ? Love me and wait for me, Fresia."

"Oh, I wish you were going to stay poor, Marcus, and I wish you would come back ever so soon and marry me. Or send for me to come to you. I'd come. Think how short life is."

"Rubbish ! Life is long, and the whole world is before us, for anyone to take who knows how. Don't you understand ?"

No, she did not understand. But he kissed her full on the lips, as her master, bending back her pale head, almost biting her neck where the pulse beat quickly. And as she was leaning back in his arms, very white, forgetful of the place and the time, he lifted her up again, roughly.

"You see, all these rags ?" as he spoke he pulled a knot of rags out of a rent in one of the sacks. "Ugh, what a stink ! Smell, what filth. Where do you suppose they came from ? Who wore them and made them so dirty ? What have they been used for ? They are supposed to have been disinfected before they are dumped here. I think, though, they stink of typhoid and scarlet fever and everything vicious and the devil himself. But to-morrow it will be another matter. They will be put to boil in the big vat, then they will be bleached, then they will be passed through one machine after another until they turn into that stuff there," he pointed to the pieces which, still wet, were hung out to dry on the terrace.

"Money is like that, Fresia. When you have got it, no one asks how you made it. As long as it is there, as long as you win it ! Fresia ! You'll wait for me, won't you ?"

"Yes."

She seemed as a woman in a dream. The one o'clock whistle startled her. Marcus helped her to get down from the top of the sack, snatching another kiss on her neck. The big doors opened. The operatives, men and women, came in quickly, shoving, pushing each other, laughing roughly. A few minutes later each one was at his post, and work began its brutal and sacred song. The gesture of the machine and the gesture of the workman moved together with such precise harmonious rhythm, the one evoked by the other, that the

same intensity of knowledge and of will seemed to animate both the thinking creature and matter disciplined by man.

The days and the nights passed over the grey factory. The chimney stack continued to clear with its soaring height, its powerful whistle, the mist of the early morning, the lights of sunset. Mount Rovella clothed herself with impenetrable vapour, wrapped herself in soft green velvet, made herself golden and dewy as the seasons changed. Every now and then tiny human beings strove one with another in noisy, useless quarrels, in disagreements, between masters and men, in strikes and lock-outs, dark with menace. Then Mount Rovella bent silently to the torrent, the torrent whispered some ironical mysterious word to the factory which remained impassive with its eyes wide open towards the valley where other factories lifted the massive swords of their chimneys. And the tiny human being became once more at peace.

Between peace and war, human beings, unlike the earth and material things, grow old.

Fresia's fine black hair was showing some white threads, now that she had reached the age of forty. In her mouth, which had been so fresh and was now growing flabby at the corners, her neglected teeth were turning yellow and decaying. For a long time Marcus had left off writing to her. According to various tales brought by returned emigrants, he was making a fortune in Canada and had grown more American than a Yankee, holding in a steel fist the threads of intricate business affairs. His silence had not discouraged the woman in her fidelity. But of that long-ago promise she had drawn nourishment and life, her only reason for hope (and maybe a vain one) to be with her in the throwing of the spool between the threads of her loom and the swelling of the litanies in church on festival days. Though everyone was quite certain Marcus would never come back, Fresia's almost religious feeling was respected ; and the silent creature with the dog-like eyes came little by little to be considered a widow.

On the contrary, one fine day, Marcus came back. Beardless, dried up, tanned, with bitter cruel lines like scars at the

corners of his eyes and mouth, perfectly dressed in an English suit of small tan and brown check. He jumped out of the Biella train at the tree-embowered station of Valle San Nicolao and looked round to recognise familiar places.

On the threshold of a café a fat woman with hair on her chin glanced at him for a moment, indifferently. He took the stony path leading to the Campore, crossed the bridge over the Stroma, paused a moment to stare at the torrent which lashed the stones on the shore with cold angry spray. He felt, more than he saw, his country, his own country. At his shoulders Mount Rovella rough and hard as its name, already dark under the threat of night ; the hills in front with their vine-bearing summits still in the sun ; and factory beyond factory ; on the horizon, dominating everything, the white peak of San Bernadino with San Dolcino's cross cut clearly in the blue.

From Campore to Valle Mosso he passed through flocks of factory-hands coming home from work. None of the old ones recognised him. He knew none of the young ones. He had come back, as he had vowed to Fresia and to himself, very rich. As then, and more even than then, he was alone.

First in New York, then in Chicago, then in the interior of Canada, mechanic, shop-hand, secretary, inventor, partner in a doubtful enterprise, always on the point of shipwreck but always keeping afloat and engineering complicated commercial enterprises—gifted where business was concerned with the miraculous flair of an animal of prey—he had never lost sight of his goal. Hard and plastic at the same time, he had known how to manœuvre and how to impose himself. Neither wine, nor luxury, nor women, nor friends had come in and corrupted the hungry austerity of his life. He had been a perfect artist in wealth ; and he had made use, to gain his ends, of all means which do not infringe too much upon the criminal code. To gain his ends ! Not to enjoy them. How should he enjoy them. When a fortune is there you must count it, watch over it, place it so that it yields and increases, treat it as something living that can rot, run away, die.

Builder and slave, priest and soldier, of his one wealth, he

loved it for itself, solid, ample, well invested and laid by, a magnificent booty and lordship. He might buy an old wool-textile factory (why not, if it were possible, the one that belonged to Pietro Oddo, where he had worked as a boy?) and he could reorganise it and enlarge it, recruiting more workmen, increasing and perfecting the machinery, putting fresh blood into the industry, managing, as a despot, men, instruments, land.

Pietro Oddo, old and tired, without sons to succeed him in business, might perhaps be glad to sell him the factory on good terms.

He made the attempt.

One Sunday, three or four days after Marcus' arrival, the two men, sitting face to face in the study on the ground floor of the establishment, fought their astute duel with equal weapons. Both of them knew and revered the value of His Majesty Money, because they had coveted it, gathered it together, defended it, cent by cent. They were alike too, as a father is like his son, in their low stubborn foreheads, in their harshly-outlined profiles, in the prudent and tenacious cleverness that characterises the Biellese race. The interview was a masterpiece of astuteness, of practical common sense, of business foresight. On the whole, they were agreed. Next day they were to meet again. How did it happen that just at the gate of the factory, grey under the grey sky of the sultry Sunday evening, Marcus should find himself face to face with Fresia? Perhaps she had seen him go in, and had waited for him. The moment he saw her, he felt the certainty that she was to him as the eyes in his face, as the blood in his veins; we do not think of these things because they are part of ourselves.

They greeted each other simply. Walking side by side, they took the tortuous path that leads uphill to canton Viola. There was no one about, the women were at vespers, the men at the public house.

"Have you kept well all the time?" Marcus asked placidly.

"Yes, but now I am alone. My mother is dead. You are thinner than you used to be, Marcus."

She made not even the most timid allusion to the silence of so many years' length, to the promise that he did not remember or perhaps wished to forget, or to the wealth, opaque and shapeless mass, which separated them.

But did it really exist, that wealth? It seemed that nothing separated them, not even the air, so bare and transparent did they appear the one to the other. How long was it since they had last met? the day before? No, twenty years ago, and Fresia's mouth had grown flabby, her skin faded, and her hair was partly white. Marcus bore on his face and in his soul the hardness wrought by a violent and grasping life. Nevertheless she was the only woman for him, the one whom you can throw in a corner as if she were an old tag and who for a long time does not even intrude upon your memory; yet she stands apart, waiting, silently, humbly, faithfully. If he had not come back, she would have waited until the day of her death. She was ignorant and rough, suited in this too to him, for he had no learning save that of gain. And she bore in her dog-like eyes, in her submissive caressing voice, in the slenderness of her body, something that was necessary for his rest, since he was always on the alert, in arms, vigilant, in the noise of the metallic sound of money. She asked nothing. He might have left her there, callously, at the street corner, and she would have remained without protest.

He gazed at her for a long time. In spite of the handiwork of time, there still survived in her the type, the indescribable expression which had called his heart when he was twenty. For the sake of that changeless expression she herself was changeless in his eyes, like the house where one grows up, the place where one was born.

Calmly, like a man who takes up the thread of a speech interrupted a few minutes before, Marcus turned to the woman and, neither sadly nor joyfully said, "I am just going to buy Pietro Oddo's factory. When I am the owner, I will marry you." Fresia made no answer, and they went on their way together.

(From "Le Solitarie." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)



DINO PROVENZAL

(-)



(I)

ST. BARTHOLOMEW'S NIGHT

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

SOR Gustavo Bracci and Tommaso did not get on particularly well together, or rather they did not get on either well or badly (as Sor Gustavo used to mutter to himself) being brothers-in-law and not brothers. You can pass over a thing without saying anything, when it's with your brother ; but with a brother-in-law there really are things you can't stand.

To begin at the beginning. When Sor Gustavo was a young man, he had managed very well without an agent, and his land gave a good return in spite of it. He had never felt the need of a butler but his house flourished quite well without. His affairs seemed to look after themselves. But as soon as he had got married to Laura, everyone began talking about his dignity and his respectability and whatnot and to suggest his property ought to be better looked after ; and finally he found himself saddled with that sly old creature Tommaso, as his secretary, bailiff, agent, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera. All these different functions were so absorbing that things only went really well when Tommaso went away or was ill for a few days.

So the only thing was to give him the sack. But Sor Gustavo, who was so confident and determined with his brother-in-law, crumpled up when his wife was there, and went back on his word and even went as far as saying that he'd never really meant to offend the dear old creature.

As for Tommaso, he felt quite sure of his post at the Braccis', but sometimes his sister reproved him on the sly all the same. Gustavo would certainly have been delighted if he had heard even half the things she had said. But Tommaso maintained a discreet silence ; and after Laura had been calling him names for the last hour, he put on his best smile when the young couple were both there, and looked a little defiant as if he was going to say : "Gustavo, I'm master in this house !"

So he was master, was he ? Wasn't this the Braccis' house then ? Wasn't Gustavo master in his own house ? Poor Sor Gustavo ! Tommaso, who only remembered all the naughty words of the Latin he had learnt at school, had solved the problem by means of Latin. *Domus* in Latin means house. *Domina* is the lady of the house. The word *donna* which means woman, comes from *domina* ; so as neither Gustavo nor he were *donni*, they couldn't possibly be masters in the house either. So the one true and undoubted ruler was Laura, of whom they were both terrified.

* * *

Gustavo received a definite proof of his wife's superior authority only a month or two after he was married. It was on the morning of the 20th of August.

"Look here," she had said. "The twenty-fourth is daddy's birthday."

"Oh yes. . . . Saint Bartholomew. . . ."

"Yes. So I thought. . . ."

Gustavo understood at once : "She's asking my *permission*, just like Tommaso. That means that on Sunday they'll both go off to Monteacuto and spend the day with their father. They may come back the same evening or they might spend the night there and I'm left to myself for a day. . . . Well, well. . . ."

But really Gustavo had not understood at all ; Laura continued cheerfully :

"So I thought it would be nice to ask him to dinner or something, but you know what he is—on a day that's anything

special. You know, he won't move an inch without Mother, and if they both come then there's my sister Rosina left all alone. So I thought we might ask them all three, what do you think?"

Gustavo tried to think of something to say because really . . . but he was too late with his answer ; while he was thinking of what other arrangement would be possible for a meal, Laura had gone on to another question—where her people should sleep.

"I think this would be the best thing. After all, three of us can get into our bed at a squash—it's so big—Mother, Rosina and I. Then you and Daddy can sleep upstairs in Tommaso's bed : if you squeeze a bit there ought to be room. As for Tommaso, he can take the mattress off his bed and we'll have it in the passage between the parlour and the drawing-room ; he'll manage just for one night."

Gustavo thought all these possibilities seemed quite impossible, so he said very tentatively :

"But supposing. . . ."

"Oh well," she interrupted. "If you don't like sleeping with Daddy, that doesn't matter a bit. You can go on the mattress in the passage and Tommaso can sleep with Daddy ; I rather think that might be better because. . . ."

"No, I was saying. . . ."

"You weren't saying anything : and anyhow there's nothing to say. There's only one question—whether you're with Daddy and Tommaso's upstairs or whether you're upstairs and Tommaso's with Daddy. You see what I mean."

When Laura said : "You see what I mean" she always seemed to imply, "and if you don't see you're a fool ; and I don't care about having fools in *my* house. . . ."

"Yes, I see," Gustavo acquiesced meekly, and hung his head.

* * *

Gustavo had to get up at five just as he was sleeping so beautifully, whether he wanted to or not : there was such a terrific lot to do. He had to go and meet Sor Bartolomeo,

Sora Gegia and Rosina. Tommaso was going to see about the arrangements and Laura . . . oh well, Laura was fearfully busy that day, what with shopping and dusting and making beds and seeing about the house and the food, with no one but her good-for-nothing "daily" to help her.

Out of bed, then, quick ! Gustavo was still half-asleep when they practically drove him out of doors : the parents were coming ever so soon now ; they couldn't come when it was hot in the middle of the day. . . .

All three of them came—or rather all four, because Sor Bartolomeo had come across old Sodi as he was coming through the Piestro. And as Sodi was called Bartholomew too, and was a widower without any children ; he felt it would be too bad not to ask him along as well when it was both of their birthdays. They didn't come with empty hands either ; Sor Bartolomeo brought a basket of apples, Sora Gegia had a napkin full of chestnut cakes as big as this, and Sodi had brought a bottle of Samos that said : "Drink me, drink me, drink me !"

Laura did not like having anyone about when she was busy in the house, so after a little afternoon nap, which was a kind of rehearsal for the night, everyone went out and wandered about in Pistoia.

At seven in the evening they had dinner. Gustavo thought it would be at mid-day as it always used to be ; but as usual he had thought wrong. Laura had explained that now the only people who have their chief meal at mid-day are peasants, and that Signor Bartolomeo . . . no, she didn't mean that . . . and to be polite to Sodi, too. . . .

Actually they had had two chief meals ; at mid-day there were beef-steak and fowl, an omelette, fruit and cheese . . . did they want to burst, or what ? And look at the way Tommaso was putting it all away ! The others talked and Sodi made little jokes. Rosina was fascinated by the lovely pictures on the walls (there was one of scarlet water-melons, a brace of dead game that looked as if you could feel the softness of the feathers, and a bit of newspaper that you could read just as if

it were a real piece of printed paper). And Tommaso thought of nothing but eating and drinking.

But in the evening, luckily (may Laura be blessed for ever for the arrangements !), when they were arranging where everyone was to sit, Tommaso was put next to the master of the house. The master of the house had a wonderful time trying to starve his brother-in-law. Apart from the macaroni that Laura served, Gustavo passed all the dishes round to the right (why, of course you must help Sor Bartolomeo first, it's his birthday !) or else to the left but missing out Tommaso (ladies first, what, Sora Gegia ?), and very often the dishes did not come back that way. While everyone else was talking, Gustavo was so absorbed in his little game that he sometimes forgot to help himself but he did not mind a bit, he was so delighted to spite his brother-in-law. As for Tommaso, he pretended not to notice and drank glass after glass of wine to hide his anger. He got no fowl at all ; he thought he would get some meat but Gustavo only gave him a little bit of fat that no one else wanted. When the salad and hard-boiled eggs came round, he only had one lettuce leaf and a tiny piece of white, and he didn't get any of those little balls of force-meat at all. . . .

At last, when everyone was drinking Sor Bartolomeo's health and listening to the touching little rhyme that Laura was reciting with tears in her eyes :

“ . . . O dearest Gegia, blessed in the wealth
Of your Laurina's happiness and health !
And doubly blest when all is said and done
In good Gustavo, your beloved son ! ”

then they brought in the pudding. They were little tarts ; those Tommaso had made (he was very good at that sort of thing if Laura just kept an eye on him), had jam on and then were all soaked in red wine ; and then baked with egg and bread crumbs and butter and whatnot ; but they never came near Tommaso then.

Well, at last the meal was over and everyone went off to bed. Sodi said he could perfectly well lie on the floor, like when he

was in the army ; but everyone protested and finally Tommaso lay down on the floor near Sodi, who was installed on his mattress. Then you heard the three women, who were all in the same bed, laughing and talking ; and Sor Bartolomeo and Gustavo talking in their bed ; then peace reigned.

Where was the peace though anyhow ? Gustavo at least had satisfied his desires : he had made that greedy old Tommaso angry. Tommaso ? Well, Tommaso, who ought to have been filled with food, was filled with anger instead—anger against Laura who had paid no attention to him when he looked at her beseechingly, anger against the parents and Rosina, in whose honour the whole thing had been arranged, and anger, rage, fury and deadly hatred against Gustavo, who had taken advantage of his good nature. After all, Signor Gustavo, who thought so much of himself, hadn't rescued Tommaso from the streets or anything ; he must realise that Tommaso had been working for the mayor of Giumigliano before being with him, and he used to earn thirty lire a month there as well as getting board and lodging.

Tommaso thought about it all for a long time, turning over and over between the wall and the mattress, till well after midnight. Then he got sick of lying on such a hard floor, and got up ; a sudden fierce thought impelled him to open the door very, very softly and to creep out groping his way along in the dark. On the table in the next room he found a dish. His fingers and nose and tongue all agreed : it was those lovely little tarts. . . . Aaah ! There were four beauties ; he devoured them. Then he felt something rather damp and rough ; that's the fowl . . . and there he stood biting and sucking and licking and spitting out all the bones on the floor, he was in such a hurry. He was so thirsty though . . . What's this ? He smelt Sodi's Samos. . . . Glou-glou-glou—he drank it down in great gulps. "Forcemeat . . . o-oh ! lovely . . . and they've not got any bones to bother me. . . . Now we'll find some other wine because there isn't any more Samos ; Good heavens, what a lot those others must have drunk ! But there's all this Marsala. . . . Glou-glou-glou-

glou. . . . Hullo, and here's the macaroni : there's plenty of this—you see they didn't want to spoil their appetite by eating too much of the first dish. Good, by Jove ! Really there's no one I know who can make such a good stew as Laura ! That creature Gustavo ought to be jolly well thankful he's managed to get a wife like that !²

So he ate and drank, and drank and ate, and ate and drank and finally felt rather like bed again. But he had drunk rather too much and he forgot there wasn't any bed to speak of that night, so he instinctively groped for the stairs—he would go up to his room and finish his wine up there. He held the bottle in one hand, and groped about with the other. Somehow or other he made a mistake and found himself in the drawing-room ; but he thought he had got to the stairs all right and began going up. Stairs, were they ? It was the closet all full of little glass ornaments, his mother's wedding present to the young couple. . . . Good Lord ! . . . There was a great clatter and smashing and snapping of glass and broken wood, and Tommaso crashed head first, fell on his bottle, broke it and cut himself. Sodi woke up with a start and was the first to scream "Stop thief !" at the top of his voice.

The women came down weeping and the men came down shouting. Sor Gustavo was brandishing a huge knife and yelled : "Out of here, you devils !"

As usual, Laura was the most sensible person there ; she found a box of matches, lit a candle and threw some light on the bloody scene. The whole room was topsy-turvy ; Sor Bartolomeo was lying on the floor, having fainted with fright (he had stumbled on the mattress and thought it was a man-trap) ; the china closet all in pieces and all the little ornaments broken ; and Tommaso lying motionless and pale, dripping with blood and Marsala.

* * *

Next day, a truce was declared between Gustavo, who sat miserably in a corner, and Tommaso, who was lying solemnly in bed, with a wounded hero kind of bandage round his head, silent, serious and gloomy.

Laura declared the truce: the only thing left for the brothers-in-law to do was to observe it. The arrangement was that Gustavo should give Tommaso thirty lire a month (that ridiculous idea of giving him twenty-nine lire was definitely to be put an end to). Then if there was anything left over in the house, Tommaso could have it ; but he must pay for his own cigarettes. At table, Laura was to be served first, of course ; and Tommaso and Gustavo would take it in turns as to who should come next ; that was on week-days, but on Sundays and holidays Laura would serve everyone as she liked. If Tommaso broke anything, its value would be deducted from his wages : and finally, he was to do absolutely what his sister told him because she was at least ten years older than he was in common sense although she was really only a year older in time.

Gustavo agreed, and now and then he looked rather pathetically out of the window at the extraordinarily expressive little name-plate of the street, "Patience Road."

Tommaso said nothing because he knew quite well the kind of things his sister had been saying to him when they were alone : she had stuck up for Gustavo ; but when in public she would defend him, Tommaso, her brother.

I will tell you another time whether they kept their truce faithfully or not.

(From "Uomini, Donne e Diavoli." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

(II)

BETWEEN TWO TRAINS

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

"S U Z Z A R A—the ugly name of an ugly place ; I've never been there but it is sure to be hideous : a restaurant full of flies . . ."

The pen was so hard that it stuck in the paper and made holes, so that I really had to give up writing to give vent to my bad temper. I had an excellent reason for being in a bad tem-

per. I got out of the train at that miserable station to have a cup of coffee, and while I was drinking it the train went off without me. My friend yelled at me out of the window that he would see to my suitcase and deliver it safe and sound in Milan. I wasn't worrying about the suit-case ; but what about me ? I had three hours to wait before another train came along.

I put down the sort of glorified nail they had palmed off on me as a pen, and looked round at the dirty counter with dirty glass jars on it (one of antediluvian-looking biscuits, one of sweets, and one of dusty macaroons), the grubby walls and four little marble tables. At one of these tables there was sitting a well dressed man of about thirty-five. He had curly hair and wore gold-rimmed glasses ; his face was intelligent and very expressive. He kept looking at me with his smiling eyes and cynical mouth ; I stared back at him and tried to make him understand that I disliked being looked at ; but he seemed to stare all the harder in spite of it. Then suddenly he got up, picked his hat up off the table and came to where I was sitting.

"Allow me. . . ."

"But . . . certainly. . . ."

"You must know me. . . ."

"I am sure I don't."

"Oh, excuse me . . ."(he seemed a little taken aback). "I knew you, so I thought . . . and of course everyone knows me . . . I am *l'on revole* Frezzi, M.P."

"Ah !" (I bowed slightly, not much surprised).

"Well . . . I'll tell you then. I saw your wonderful article on members of parliament in the paper. You know ; I always read everything you write, I always enjoy your work so much."

"Please don't pay me compliments I don't deserve."

"I certainly don't intend to—that isn't what I'm here for at all. You see . . . I shan't be long, I haven't much to say . . . but I really wanted to tell you that I'm a member of parliament purely by accident. My father's a member and

so's my uncle and so was my father-in-law when I got married ; and I'd always been destined to stand for Montecitorio. It was a profession or post, or whatever you like to call it, just as good as any other. Now you say that parliamentary elections are an unnecessary public burden, and whoever has most men personally attached to him gets into parliament, and nothing else really matters. Well, I think that's quite true ; don't go and think that I'm in the least proud of the two-thousand fools who voted for me. I'd much rather be praised by a single person—you, for instance . . .”

“But I told you. . . .”

“Yes, you're right. Now listen . . . I'm just going to do an extraordinarily stupid thing. No, please don't laugh ; I'm being perfectly serious. I honestly think you can get me out of this. When I saw you coming in I thought you could straight away.”

“But”

“Of course, you mean to say I don't know you. You might say that, but it isn't true. I know you much better than lots of people who have never said a sincere and sensible thing to me in their lives ; why, look at all the things I've read of yours ! Haven't you ever felt the need of confiding in anyone—anyone, the first person you meet—or to take hold of someone's arm and ask him to help you, just like that ? I seem to have lost all my will power—I want someone to build up my courage, and I want someone to take me by the scruff of my neck and push me back into the right way ; I don't mind if he drags me about and kicks me if only . . .”

You could see he was suffering ; he turned very red and wiped away the perspiration from his brow—but perhaps it was only an excuse for hiding his face. “I don't know—but in any case—if I can be any use to you. . . .”

“I hope you can. But please don't be sarcastic, although you do it so beautifully. In your article about members of parliament you talk about how convenient it is having free passes on the trains, trips to Rome and little furnished rooms . . . that may be . . . but I'm not one of that sort, you know. I've got

my wife, and an adorable little girl at Milan, and I'm . . . well, strictly monogamous : and it's never been much of a hardship to me. And now such a terrible thing has happened. Excuse me—but do you happen to be married ?”

“Nearly.”

“But . . .” he said, very much distressed, “If you’re laughing at me . . . you mean . . . I mean . . . excuse me . . . I shan’t trouble you any . . .”

I took pity on his confusion, took his hand warmly and shewed him with a glance that I hoped he would go on.

“It’s quite simple, what’s happened to me. People like you write short stories and things about this sort of thing . . . I mean . . . I’ve fallen in love with someone else. It sounds absolutely ridiculous. I know ; but it isn’t a bit, really. With someone like me. You see I’m not satisfied with a scrap of romance and deceiving my wife and what not. If I get the appointment I’m hoping for” (and he looked up eagerly at the clock) . . . “you know, I long for it and I’m afraid of it at the same time . . . I’m quite capable of saying ‘Let’s go off together for ever and ever’ and the wire to my wife begging her pardon, and get my soul damned into the bargain.”

“But tell me—isn’t there some sort of external difficulty in the way ? Is the young lady quite free ?”

“Yes ; her husband ran away from her and went off to America with another woman ; the low wretch . . .”

“Yes, indeed.”

“I know what you mean, you mean I shall be a low wretch too, to-morrow. But what good does that do ? I know perfectly well I shall be, but that doesn’t help ; I haven’t the courage to do anything about it. So in an hour’s time, when the train for Brescello comes in, I shall jump in, and look up things in the time-table, and strap up my suit-case and argue with the porter and do all sorts of things with my eyes and my mouth and my ears and my hands, just to stop my conscience pricking me. . . . I always used to do that when I was little, when I was in a difficulty or anything. Then if my conscience tries to have me on again I shall just answer, ‘*abula.*’ There’s

a sort of illness called like that ; and what fault of ours is it if we're ill, after all ? I only wish I could get better !”

“What of ? Abulia or Love ?”

He seemed perplexed.

“Well . . . well, love.”

“That’s not very difficult. Are you fond of your family ?”

“I am absolutely devoted to them. I married for love. My wife is young and pretty, and my little girl . . .”

He pulled out his pocket-book and shewed me a photograph of a fat little dimpled face with a wise little smile and masses of curly hair.

“Excuse my being inquisitive, but didn’t I see a wedding ring just then in your pocket-book.”

“Yes.”

“Give it to me . . . Good. There ! And now you’ve got on your ring, tell me ; do you really love the woman you’re going to meet at Brescello ?”

“Brescello ? However did you guess ? Who told you she came from Brescello ?”

“For goodness’ sake keep calm ; you’ve just said so yourself a minute or two ago. Are you quite sure you love her ?”

“Good God ! Why, it is a sort of anguish—something that seems to keep gnawing at me here (and he touched his stomach) whenever I think about it, a sort of constant need to be with her and talk to her and. . . .”

“Tell me now—did you feel like this right from the beginning ? Think a moment : did she shew you she cared for you at all ?”

“Oh, yes !”

“And what about you ?”

“Oh, I made love to her a bit, you know, just about as much as every man is bound to do to a pretty woman. She was rather flattered obviously, but she pretended to think I didn’t mean what I said, so, of course, I insisted—and then I pretended to be offended at her not believing me and. . . .”

“Go on. Out with it. So you pretended you were really in love with her ?”

"Well, almost. Anyhow, I said lots and lots of things to her, sort of passionate things . . . the kind of thing I used to say to my wife ten years ago ; and I talked in a kind of low, hurried way. . . ."

"It was all acting, though."

"Yes, acting, I suppose. But then I began to mean it. Good heavens, yes ! Now I've got simply no control over myself at all. And now I've gone and arranged this appointment which'll mean absolute ruin for my family. Yes, ruin, I tell you. You see, I'm not one of those people who can believe in two things at once ; I couldn't possibly go home and tell lies and belong half to my wife and half to my—er— . . to *her*, that is. No . . . I should go and tell everything to my wife, quite naturally—I'd tell her everything. So it means either complete separation and damnation (I do believe in that and the Church and everything, only this time somehow religion doesn't seem to be any good), or else. . . ."

"Or else go home, completely cured and redeemed and everything ; that's what we'll do now."

The little train had just come in and they were beginning to shout, "Guastalla, Parma ! No change !"

The member of parliament got up and began looking for his luggage. He was just going to hail a porter when I said, quietly, but firmly :

"No, sit down. I have promised to cure you and I mean to keep my promise, but first of all you must promise me to take the next train, not this one."

"All right, only I must wire. . . ."

"Yes—I'll come with you. You promise ?"

I dictated two telegrams almost word for word. The first one was to Brescello, and said, "Prevented coming writing," and the other was to Milan saying, "Arrive to-night last train" : it was addressed to his wife.

"So we can go together to-night."

"That's all very well, but you're interfering with violent feelings, you know. . . ."

He launched out into a flood of words. I think that if he had

ever got to Brescello he would have drowned his poor lady in a sea of talking. He really wanted to get something off his chest, and all the feelings that he usually repressed and kept back with ordinary people suddenly burst out with extraordinary violence.

In the train (our train really did arrive after all that waiting) he talked and talked. He thanked me effusively ; he poured out all sorts of information about himself and his love affair and his family. He got quite lively and made puns about my losing my train and his losing his train of thought, and what-not. Then he declared, "You have saved a soul ! I really thought I was in love after I'd said I was so often, and I really might have been if it hadn't been for you. But you have saved a family, a family, the most sacred human institution there is, bound together by love and blood and suffering. . . ."

He asked my advice several times : ought he to tell his wife all about it ? I told him not to, every time he asked me ; it seemed rather unnecessary and as I saw he loved high-sounding sentiments I said to him solemnly :

"You alone have sinned : you must not make your wife suffer unnecessarily by telling this sad story. Bear your sorrow alone, and let that be your punishment."

At Milan I met my friend ; he laughed at me and asked me what on earth I had done in the three hours I had spent at Suzzara ; my companion was met by a little woman who was just as young and pretty as he had described her. I am sure that for her sake one would give up Brescello and Lentizione and Sorbola and Chiozzola and all the other places round that must be perfectly ghastly if they are anything like their names.

And it must be so lovely confiding in such a sweet little creature ! He seemed to think so too ; he poured out everything to her the moment they were together.

That is how I saved a soul between two trains. The worst of it is that his wife is always so very grateful to me for having sent her back her husband. She has told me so lots and lots of times, and she always comes to tell me just when she knows I am alone, so that she can tell me better. Of course I'm not

really in love with her, but I *pretend* I am. Sometimes comedies do have funny endings. Now who will set *me* free? Whoever will, will "save a family, the most sacred human institution there is, bound together by love and blood and suffering. . . ."

(From "Uomini, Donne e Diavoli." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)



COSIMO GIORGERI-CONTRI

(-)



NERINA'S HOUSE

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

WITH the evening came quiet and romance : the house, the garden, and the hill to our right, and the road to our left, were steeped in its stillness. Mechanically I turned to look for the last time at the front of the house, dark and gloomy, with its closed shutters and its air of lonely desolation.

The agent of the county family the Boschi, took hold of my glass as if he wanted to distract me from my thoughts, which seemed contrary to his plans.

"Won't you drink anything ? It's the local wine. . . . What do you think of it ?"

He was about forty-five or fifty, tall and broad, and wore his white hair in a kind of crown round his jovial red face. I had only met him half an hour ago, but I felt as if I had always known him, he conformed so amazingly to a preconceived type. He was very friendly too. It was an excellent opportunity for selling the house. The whole thing was going at such a ridiculously low price that it looked exactly as if the owners were longing to get rid of it. We had just seen over it ; now we were resting a little before I had to catch my train, and the agent was getting me to try the local wine.

"Well then, I'll ask the Count what he thinks about it," he went on, "and I hope we'll be able to come to some agreement. As for me," he winked knowingly, "I have a sort of idea that he'll protest violently at first, but he'll have to give in in the end. I think we can really take it as settled."

He rubbed his hands ; I got up but he held me back.

"You've got plenty of time. Why, it's only four o'clock. And here's the Count—just going out. . . ."

I heard dragging footsteps in the passage, then a cough, and someone blowing his nose rather timidly.

"Did you say he was going out?" I asked, rather absent-mindedly.

"Yes . . . look. . . . You'll see him pass by the window in a minute."

I looked where he was looking, and after a moment or two I saw a tall, bent old man go by, with a long beard and an old felt hat. He stopped a moment with his back to us, and then looked up, either at the house or at the weather, I don't quite know which. After this he coughed and set off again.

"He's taking his little constitutional," said the agent. "But he's so fond of those four walls he'd never leave them at all."

"Then why is he selling it?"

The agent realised he had said something stupid and tried to hide it by saying hastily: "Well . . . you know, there are creditors. . . . He'll feel all right afterwards; only, now, of course, he does feel rather. . . ."

He trailed off, ending in gesticulations. Then he drank off half a glass of wine, and felt his self-assurance restored.

"It's better so. It's a kind of mania. . . . He ought to get away from this place . . . then he'll turn into someone just like everyone else. . . ."

I looked interested. He was well launched in his subject and continued:

"You see that little house just opposite?"

"Yes, I see."

"It's shut now. The Count spends half the day though looking at the window there. . . ."

What? Was he in love at that age?

"There's absolutely no way of getting him away. . . . What with all this hanging about he's got that horrid chronic bronchitis; that's why he's always coughing."

"But. . . ." I asked, a little hesitatingly. "His . . . his . . . the woman he's in love with?"

The agent's eyes opened wide as if he were very much amused at what I had said. Then he got very red, and after a bit he let out a great hearty guffaw.

"Well, you've just hit it ! That's it, the woman he's in love with. . . . Only the woman died twenty years ago !"

And he laughed still louder. I was amazed. Well . . . what about it then ?

"The Count was only about twenty then," the agent went on ; he had really got going with his story. "She must have been about eighteen, and she was called Luigina. She lived in the village here ; her people were artisans, or *artisti* as we say here. She lived over there, in that house opposite.

"They were in love for two years ; of course the Count's father noticed and made a terrific fuss about it and said he'd have no more to do with them and so on. But there wasn't enough money to send him away, unfortunately—so they went on with their love-making through the window, so to speak ; you know, the way people do everywhere."

I nodded as if I were quite convinced it was a general habit.

"Well, to make a long story short, they carried on so much that one day the old Count got more angry than he'd ever done before and sent for the girl's father. You can just imagine, there was a hell of a row ; and from that day onwards there were no more open windows in *her* house.

"Then she started getting ill. You should have seen the poor boy then ; day and night, day and night, he was like a lost soul, poor thing. He never took his eyes off that window, and stood there watching to see when they opened it and when they shut it, and absolutely counting the minutes till the time when they lit up indoors and seeing who came to the window and so on. And he used to say to me, with tears in his eyes : 'Carlino—they call me Carlino (Charlie) even though I am so big—help me and I'll be everlastingly grateful. They've told me she's better now. I want to see her.'

"He had completely got hold of the wrong end of the stick ; she was anything but better, she had a good old attack of typhoid—that is, a bad attack, don't you know ? Well, he

thought it was grief and all that ; nothing of the kind—it was the water. There were quite a lot of people down with typhoid that year. And when I was on the rural district council, I did my best to get the village provided with proper drinking water. What do you think of it ?”

He poured out another glass of wine, evidently waiting for me to make compliments about the village water-supply. But I said : “Well, what then ?” and he went on :

“But the poor young man was absolutely convinced that it was sorrow, and that she’d get better again if only she could see him. And he went on and on, insisting and insisting so that one day, just to keep him quiet, I told him a lie—I really don’t know why, quite, only. . . . Well, I said I’d seen her and that she really was better ; and I said that next day she would look out of the window for a moment at a certain time. I thought next day I’d tell him she would on the day after, and so on, to keep him waiting. . . . Don’t you think I was right about it ?”

He didn’t even expect an answer.

“But when people say. . . . Well, just imagine what happened. It makes me shudder to think of it. Just think. . . . Next day I was sitting in this very room ; they called it the office then. It must have been just about this time of day, more or less. I remember it as if it were yesterday ; ‘Poor young man !’ I thought. ‘He’s sure to be upstairs waiting and watching. And no one will come.’ I was expecting him to come down any moment and burst into the office and say : ‘Carlino, she’s not there—what does it mean ?’ The window was shut, just as it is now ; it looked just like that—all empty and deserted.”

We both looked at the house. The twilight made it seem darker and colder than before. I made a little sign to him and his words flowed on as before : “Then suddenly I heard the shutters open. A sort of dry noise like this—piff ! as if whoever opened them were doing it very carelessly. I looked up and what do you think I saw ? I saw her—the girl . . . yes, indeed, sir ; the girl standing there at the window. But she was

as white as a ghost, with a sort of deathly stare in her eyes, you know ; and she was in her nightdress. . . . in her nightdress, poor darling ! What ? What's the matter ?”

There was nothing the matter. Only in the tense silence I thought I heard a little creaking noise as if one of the slats in the shutters were moving.

“Well, you can imagine the rest. I've been told there are ever so many cases in the paper of people with fever who throw themselves out of the window. But to think it could happen here ! And that poor boy waiting up there. . . . When he saw the shutters opening think what he must have said to himself : ‘Why, here she is ; here she is quite well again !’ And then being quite helpless, don't you know ? and seeing her fall like that . . . and all he could do was to dash out into the street screaming like a lunatic. . . .

“Too bad to make you feel gloomy,” he concluded. “But it is a sad story, though. Years ago it was . . . but the Count's never wanted to go away from here . . . not from this room really. There's no one to stop him either, now. The years have gone by, and now he's got to make up his mind about it. All his affairs have gone to pieces. Whatever I've done about it, it's all been no use. He never bothered about anything, he only had his own funny ideas. His relations—his nephew and a cousin too—sponged on him. Well now . . . it's a pity, such a clever gentleman ! Clever ? Why, there's no one like him ! He's always reading and studying, writing too. Pity he's always reading poetry. . . .”

His lips curled disdainfully. Just then more footsteps were heard on the path outside ; I recognised them immediately. Then I heard a dry cough—an old man's cough. It was the Count coming home.

“I mustn't let him see you,” Carlino exclaimed. “He's so suspicious. . . .”

And he dashed out, but he was not in time to prevent the old man coming into the servants' hall where we were sitting.

When he came in he stopped a moment and stared at me. Then the agent had to introduce me.

"Mr. What's-his-name—a friend of mine."

The Count raised his eyes to greet me. Quiet blue eyes, young eyes in contrast with his white hair and beard. But they had a kind of colourless youthfulness, like periwinkles grown in the shade.

"How do you do?" he said, taking off his hat and putting it down on the table. "Please sit down. So you're Carlino's friend?"

He did not seem at all convinced of our friendship; he did not think I was the kind of person to be a friend of his agent's. But he went on unabashed:

"It's a good thing you've come to see him. No one ever comes here. Are you from these parts?"

"No. I live in the town."

"The town, do you? All my relations want me to go and live there too—but I shan't, at least I hope not," he corrected himself, rather hesitatingly. "My dearest wish is to be buried here in the village."

"Sir . . ." the agent interrupted him as if to interrupt his strange melancholy.

"Well, well . . ." his master answered, smiling. "That's not the sort of thing to talk to a stranger about. Have you seen the village at all? Carlino, have you taken him to see the Comba?"

"No, we haven't really had time," Carlino answered, rather taken aback.

"That's a pity."

"What is the Comba?" I asked, feeling I must take a share in the conversation.

"It's a lovely place—a wonderful view . . . right high up."

The Count murmured almost unconsciously, staring into space:—

"This lonely hill was ever dear to me—"

(*Sempre caro mi fu quest' ermo colle—*)

I thought I had made a mistake. Did the Count read Leopardi then? I wanted to make sure so I followed up his quotation. . . .

"And sometimes there I sit and think alone"

(*Talor mi assido in solitaria parte.*)

"Ah," the old man said, not in the least astonished ; he seemed to take it as a perfectly natural thing, that one of Carlino's friends should know those immortal lines. "Yes . . . I've got the book here with me . . . I sit and read. . . ."

He took out a little book and held it out to me as in a dream. I noticed a bookmark and opened it at the place. My eyes rested on the most passionate of the immortal poems :

"Nerina, where art thou ? I hear no more"
(O Nerina, ove sei, che piu non odo)

I read it out aloud. Carlino made a sign to me and I stopped. The old man was motionless. Then, as if all these years had been but a day, a slow, age-old tear oozed between his lids and trickled down his wrinkled face.

"Poor Nerina," he murmured. "That was her house !"

"She was called Luigina," the agent whispered to me. "He's losing his memory now, you see. It isn't being old, either ; only always thinking of one thing. . . . Luigina, she was called. . . ."

"That was her house," the Count repeated.

A distant bell rang and then was silent.

In the quiet you could hear the wind softly rustling in the grass—the grass that sprang between the stones from the young girl's blood.

"This is her hour," the Count said in a slow voice. "Let us pray."

He put down the book I had given back to him, took a rosary out of his pocket and began to tell his beads. Carlino bent his head ; but instead of praying he seemed to be repeating rhythmically : "What nonsense, Nerina . . . Luigina !" as if he meant to exorcise the little poetical ghost.

But it was in deference to that little poetical ghost that I wrote a day or two later to Signor Carlino, and told him very politely that the purchase could not be arranged after all.

(From "La Tavola del Cambio." Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

delay of a few days. But who protested ? The newspaper—*Il Risorgimento*—arrived three days late. There was only one copy. First of all my father would read it, and woe to him who had torn its envelope. Then it was passed to Gismondi—the public notary—then to Doctor Procopio, and at last to the curate. Women were only allowed to glance at it, and boys had to ignore even its very existence.

But we lived peacefully—apparently, at least. We studied and learned seriously. Think only, that for amusement we were allowed to learn by heart passages from Alfieri, hymns by Manzoni and pages of Prati.

Speaking of Prati, by the way, I want to tell you a thing which happened to me.

A curious thing, if I may say so. I was fourteen years old and attended the first class of rhetoric—which is to-day the fourth year of classic *ginnasio*. At the end of the October of that year—a memorable year for me—towards five o'clock in the afternoon of a rainy day, I was looking at the deserted square through the window-panes of my father's pharmacy. I was bored. I counted the few old women, wrapped in their shawls, who entered or came out of the Cathedral. At a certain moment a coach stopped before the pharmacy with merry sound of bells, and an imposing noise. It was cold at that hour of the day. Inside the coach they had already lit a stove, so that the panes of the small windows were dimmed, and the light within appeared as if through a mysterious veil.

A young man alighted. He was wearing a tall hat *alla calabrese*, a wide fluttering mantle and carried a portmanteau embroidered like tapestry in rather faded colours. Alone in the middle of the square, it looked as if he were lost, under that thin rain, in the dusk. Presently he raised his face towards the palace in front—the palace of the Marquess of Villachiera. I did the same. There was only one window with light in it : that of the great reception-room ; and, from behind the window-panes, within the triangle of the raised curtain, a white face with a halo of black hair appeared. I recognised her at once : she was the daughter of the Marquess,

Sofia. The eyes of the unknown man and the girl's certainly met, though they scarcely saw each other. Then the curtain was drawn and the man of the mantle went towards the *Tre Re* inn slowly, almost unwillingly.

That very evening all the town had the now simple mystery explained. The traveller was nobody else than Signor Goffredo Sereni, a Professor of Letters at the *ginnasio*, recently appointed by the Minister Gioberti—of whom he had been a disciple and secretary. I see him again, in my mind's eye. He was an exceptionally kind-hearted and upright young man—a kind of man easy to find among Mazzini's followers at that time ; but he was romantic, even more romantic than Rovani, which means a good deal.

Professor Goffredo Sereni did not conceal his Mazzinian ideas. The priest Guidi, my father and Doctor Procopio would have noticed it after he had spoken a few words. But he did conceal other ideas, which sometimes troubled and excited me too. (We often used to go out for a walk together.) He was young—only twenty-one—and in the small town he had found nobody to speak to, except a few old men.

Even his pupils could not understand him, for they were mostly little rogues, and the rest were bigots. I only, being more intelligent and active, and brought up in the *Cavourian* Liberalism of my father, seemed to Professor Goffredo to deserve his attention and confidence. There was also another reason for this : our house faced the Villachiara palace. I found this out a long time afterwards, just by chance.

Goffredo had formed a friendship with Marquess Gianfranco—a superior man, a real Plutarch hero. They were frequently together, and I with them. Also it was Goffredo who first brought books of poetry and new novels to our town. Walter Scott, Doctor Carlo Varese, Dumas père, Balzac, Soulié, Richardson, Prati (the author of *Edmenegarda*), Niccolini, Rossetti, Carrer, Berchet. . . . What pleasant evenings we spent in that congenial winter !

Marquess Gianfranco decided to put his large reception-room at the disposal of the educated people of the town. Down

in a corner my father, Notary Gismondi and Doctor Procopio, would play *tarocchi* ; by the fireplace the Marquess would sit with the *arciprete* and two ladies. There were also Donna Isabella—an old cousin of the head of the house—and the young Marchioness Sofia, whom I served as winder, to unroll the wool for her bobbins. Finally, leaning against the mantelpiece, his eyes on the ceiling, Professor Goffredo would declaim, with wide gestures, the blank verse of Edmenegarda :

“It becomes you, O noble spouse of Doges,
Terrible Lioness of the fearful sea”

Or, with a gloomy voice and bent head :—

“Oh ! do not throw
On the young head the tremendous stone,
Do not throw it ! So many a time
You fell and were forgiven ! in the dust,
Wherein you fell, in agony, you felt
The joy of fortunates as an insult.”

Thus the evenings passed—slow and calm ; but very differently busy were the days.

Goffredo took me with him almost always along the lake's shore. We stopped among the leafless alder trees, on the shore, and while the clouds passed over our heads, blown by the north wind, we stood gazing in religious silence at the opposite bank of the lake. Our attentive ears caught the sound of the Austrians' trumpets, mockingly re-echoed by the harmonious valleys.

“Do you hear them ?” asked Goffredo.

“I do.”

“We have seen them run away before us, Lorenzo ! Our bayonets have pricked their backs !”

“Were you there, in the battle ?”

“I was there ! I saw King Carlo Alberto weep with joy on the evening of the battle of Goito. Fortune and right were with us. We ought to have won ! Instead. . . .”

The Austrian trumpets were still heard in the distance. “A curse on them !”

We went back home with our hearts aflame. Then the

peaceful reception-room of the Villachiara palace would not re-echo the drama of Edmenegarda, but the heroic lines of *Fantasia* or the choruses of Manzoni, which resounded challengingly under the gilded ceiling.

* * *

In December things changed. Some *émigrés* returned from Switzerland—among others the Baron D'Orri, nephew of Marquess Gianfranco. He was an elderly man, surly and haughty, who seemed to dislike those evenings so democratically spent. So the players of *tarocchi* took refuge in the parlour of the pharmacy, and Goffredo, standing by the glass-paned door, in the attitude of Milton's angel, looked at the palace in front and the central lighted window, and sighed.

He sighed, he became emaciated, he wasted away.

I was only a boy, but I understood. Too much erotic literature had passed through my mind that I should not be able to understand.

And Sofia of Villachiara, of what was she thinking? What were her feelings? Mystery. She embroidered on a canvas and did not raise her head. And when the evening parties ceased, she just appeared sometimes behind the window panes, to disappear at once.

After a few weeks the rumour was spread in the town that she was to marry the Baron.

Poor Goffredo in a few days had become the shadow of himself. He would indeed know now, through his own experience, how to declaim the furious jealousy of the English Arrigo—poor Edmenegarda's husband! How far was his mind from his school, from the hexameters to be scanned for the essay at the end of the year!

We continued, however, our walks near the lake. In the solitude of the wintry country the fury of the poor, jealous young man seemed to subside a little. He would throw himself on the hard beach, gazing at the misty sky, and remain motionless for hours. Even the Austrian trumpet did not wake him any longer from his musing.

One day, it was Christmas Eve, towards three o'clock in the

afternoon, Goffredo and I were wandering among the bare alder-trees, under a leaden-coloured sky that promised snow, silent and with bent heads, like two guilty men. Suddenly my companion stopped short, kenlt down and nodded to me to lie down. Before us two persons were speaking in subdued tones, among the alder trees that surrounded a clearing. One of them was easily recognisable : it was Giomo, the town boatman, who usually acted as ferry-man. The other . . . yes . . . though we scarcely knew him, was the Baron D'Orri : in fact nobody but he would wear those hideous whiskers, those tufts of beard under the chin, and speak with that haughty tone like a man used to addressing servants.

We drew near them, creeping like the heroes of Fenimore Cooper's romances, which we read so passionately.

"We are agreed, then?" said the Baron to the boatman. "The white fly."

"Very good, sir ; the white fly."

They parted and soon disappeared.

"Have you heard ? whispered the Professor and his eyes had terrible flashes. "Have you heard ? 'The white fly.' Do you know what it means ?"

No, I did not know. But Goffredo, with his imagination excited by the readings of Soulié's and Mery's novels, had understood everything.

"The white fly is the poor young Marchioness Sofia ! That scoundrel wants to kidnap her ! This is what he has been concocting with Giomo the boatman ! Kidnap her and then take refuge with the Austrians ! Traitor ! Judas !"

Well, to tell the truth, I failed to understand why Baron D'Orri, who could, and in fact was going to marry the Marchioness Sofia in a few months, should think of kidnapping her just on Christmas night. I told Goffredo my idea, but he declared that I was a silly boy, that I had not read Ernani or even Jean Sogar, and that I should let him be my guide, who knew life.

I promised I would. Then he produced from his pocket a dagger with a cross-shaped hilt—everyone, in those days,

would have considered himself dishonoured if he had been found to be without a dagger with a cross-shaped hilt—and made me swear that I would help him. I swore. I felt happy and proud.

“You shall see,” he said, “we two will save Sofia. To-night, when your family invites you to the midnight Mass, you shall come with me instead.”

“Where?”

“I know where. In conspiracies one never questions, one must obey blindly. We are conspirators, remember!”

I remembered, indeed, during all that afternoon and at supper, eating apple tarts—which seemed less good and tasty than usual. I kept silent. And the more the hour drew near, the more I felt undecided. But Goffredo was watching. He entered our house at the right time, and told my father that he would take care of me and bring me back home after Mass.

“We must stand by the organ,” he was brazen-faced enough to say, “to sing.”

And he gave a trial of singing together with me as we went out :—

“In the horrid cold night
You were born, O Jesus, in the hut.
Not among human beings, but between two beasts of burden.
At Bethlehem his birth took place.
Oh Good God !
And all this for my sake you did !”

“And now, silence and courage !” he concluded as soon as we were out of danger of being heard.

* * *

We went near to the lake. The waters murmured invisibly in the darkness of the night, like an approaching menace. The silence was solemn and the solitude infinite. With the help of a dark lantern, after many detours and many false turns, we found ourselves by the ferry-landing and saw Giomo's boat rocking on the black waters.

“Let us wait here,” whispered Goffredo.

We waited for a long time. One by one the church bells

seemed to awake, and spread through the cold air the joyful Christmas chimes. They seemed soft, velvet-like sounds, oscillating and half smothered in cotton-wool, but separated from one another by the dry atmosphere. I recognised the bells of the villages and those of the towns : they all seemed to announce the approach of something good, and to speak to my ear about our secrets.

"It is too cold to stand still," grumbled Goffredo. I did not move, however. I saw in my mind our cathedral all lighted, the priests saying Mass, the believers kneeling. Near our family pew I saw the Villachiara pew, and, between Donna Isabella and the Marquess Gianfranco, Sofia, pale and smiling and wise, like the picture of the *Madonna del Dito*.

"Ready !"

Goffredo grasped my hand and drew me with him.

"Quick ! Do not make any noise !" he whispered.

To the left side of the ferry-landing there was the ferryman's hut. We rushed into it, because we had not time to go further. A group of men were coming towards us. I saw distinctly Giomo and the bony and decided figure of the Baron. Then came a tall and thin person wrapped in a light-coloured mantle : "the white fly," obviously. It could not but be the young Marchioness.

They approached slowly and watchfully, but with confidence.

I saw Giomo in the darkness descending to the ferry landing and heard him say :

"Just a moment"

When Goffredo, impatiently rushed towards them shouting like a madman :

"Stop ! Stop !"

It was matter of a second. The white mantle turned in the air and fell, skilfully thrown, on my companion, enfolding him completely like a net. As for me I had not yet moved a foot, when the Baron got hold of me, muffled my mouth with a skirt of his coat, and carried me as I was into the hut. He squeezed me so hard that I fainted away.

When I came round I saw the inside of a poor cottage with a lantern hanging from the ceiling. I was lying on a straw bed, and the anxious face of Goffredo smiled at me and drew a sigh of relief.

"What has happened?" I asked with difficulty.

"Nothing, nothing, be quiet."

"And the white fly? . . ."

The Professor, smiling again, drew aside, and then I was able to see a man sitting in a corner, wrapped in a light-coloured mantle. I shall never forget him, although I never saw him again. Tall, thin, a little bent in his shoulders; the beard long and ruffled; the hands thin; on his face, in the twilight of that room, there was a shadow of infinite despondency. But that serious and thoughtful face had almost a halo—so it seemed to me—like the head of the Christ of Guido Reni, which I kept over my bed. I shall never forget it.

As if the intense astonishment of my look had won his attention, the unknown man started and gazed at me, then he asked:

"How is the boy, Goffredo?"

Did he then know my companion?

"Very well, Master," replied the Professor.

Master? My Professor called that man *Master*?

"So much the better!"

What a sweet voice! How gently it entered into my very heart!

He rose to his feet and put his hand on my head. I felt strengthened as if by a blessing. In that moment the Baron and Giomo entered the cottage hurriedly.

"We are ready, Master."

Also the Baron called him *Master*! And, a strange and incredible thing indeed, he warmly shook hands with Goffredo!

We went out. The little boat, fastened by a rope, was rocked by the waves of the lake.

"Edoardo," then said Goffredo, addressing the Baron, "are you sure they will not stop you at the custom-house?"

"All the odds are favourable to us: it is Christmas Eve. The

guards are certainly in church, because they have been ordered to go."

"But. . ."

"Goffredo, there is no time to lose!"

"I know. I only wanted to propose a safer way."

He looked at me, then went on:

"Would you like this boy to accompany the Master?" And he pointed to me. "They will not entertain suspicions, or they will suspect less."

"You are right. But has the boy courage enough?"

I rose as if pushed by a spring, and descended into the boat without saying a word.

"Bravo!" said the sweet voice of the unknown man. Then he shook hands with the Baron and the Professor, and followed me into the boat. They remained motionless on the ferry landing.

"We will wait for you, Giomo," said the Baron.

"Giomo, take care. . . ."

I heard no more. We were rocked by the lake. The deep darkness of the night surrounded us, the waves beat heavily against the sides of the boat, but I was not afraid: I was between the arms of the unknown man, protected by his mantle.

Suddenly the bells—ding . . .ding . . .ding—with their solemn and slow hymn announced the accomplishing of the holy rite of Christmas Eve: the moment of the elevation of the Host. "Peace on earth, good will towards men!"

The man who kept me in his arms freed himself from the mantle and crossed himself. I did the same, and certainly Giomo also; for the boat, abandoned for a moment to itself, had a dangerous lurch.

Ding . . . Ding . . . Ding. From all the valleys of the two shores of the lake, the sweet, slow, clear ringing reached us in the misty night. Ding . . . Ding . . . Ding!

"Pray," softly said the man to me in that moment, "Pray God that He will make your land free from the foreign rulers, great, honest and happy, and that the blood of our martyrs

may not have been shed in vain, and the dead may be content for having sacrificed their youth and life for a sacred cause and for a worthy land. Pray !”

I prayed.

We reached the border shore of Switzerland. A man—a shadow—who seemed to be waiting, said in an undertone :

“The white fly ?”

“The white fly,” replied my companion.

He landed. He stood on a rock, tall and thin, free from his light-coloured mantle, and with folded arms. He turned his eyes towards the inhospitable land from which he had to fly, and murmured :

“Good-bye, good-bye.” His voice was trembling through his tears. He pressed me against him, kissed me, and then said :

“Remember to pray. . . .”

“For you ?”

“Not for me ! For Italy.”

We went back, Giomo and I, without difficulty. Goffredo and the Baron were still in the hut waiting for us. When they saw us coming they raised their arms with a sigh of relief.

“All went well ?”

“All went well.”

“God be thanked.”

I did not ask anything, conscious of the religious solemnity of the occasion ; nevertheless they wanted me to swear secrecy. And I swore—not on the cross-shaped hilt of a dagger, but quite simply, as we swear something that we know we are able to keep.

That very night, in the Cathedral, while the people sang *O salutaris hostia*, I prayed for Italy.

* * *

Lorenzo remained silent as he finished the story of his adventure, and I respected his silence. But, guessing my curiosity, a few minutes later he resumed :

“Do you want to know who was the unknown man ? I saw him again, just by chance. One evening I was looking at the

latest issue of *Il Novelliere Illustrato*, when my eyes widened in astonishment. Yes, it is *he* ! Tall, thin, all in black—(the black fly !)—his beard, his sweet face, lean and worn, almost surrounded by a halo ! Good God ! Think how moved I was when, trembling, I read his name under that picture ! . . .

“Who ? Was it *he*, the *Master* ?”

“Yes, he, Giuseppe Mazzini !”

(From “Le Avventure.” Milano, Treves, Publishers.)

GIULIO CAPRIN

(-)

ANOTHER MAN'S CLOTHES

(Translated by Miss ALETHEA GRAHAM)

I AM sorry : but the meeting of these two people, their conversation (which I shall tell you in due course) and the circumstances in which it happened are really terribly like something in a newspaper serial.

It happened by night in a big city which was not Paris, although it might have been, on the banks of a river that reminded you of the Seine, because, after all, one river is very much like another. It was pitch dark ; there was no moon and as it was one o'clock, half the street lamps had been put out, so there was no means of judging whether it was a navigable river. But in spite of the darkness, one got the impression that its black waters, swollen with autumn rain, could bridge the gap between life and death. The water ran so swiftly, swirling and bubbling, that whoever chose it for his last plunge would find himself in Acheron in no time.

Indeed, in that great city of over a million inhabitants, where despair sent up the number of recorded suicides to five hundred or so a year, about a hundred chose the dark river for their journey to the underworld.

Naturally the people who had to die cheaply would choose the river ; but other people did as well. The popular papers had done a good deal towards making death by drowning popular ; they always described such events in highly coloured language that was extraordinarily effective even if it was somewhat hackneyed. People were easily fascinated by these persuasive articles. Among the prospective suicides, the east

end of the river was the most popular because it ran through lonely parts of the town that were not yet built over ; and they liked the left bank especially. Even a man who is longing for death seems bound by conventions and precedent.

Well, on that dark night a man was walking along the far end of the river, on the left bank quite close to the railing. He was of middle age, middle height and middling intelligence. He was known (and known to the police) as Tristan Martinez, and sometimes he had an additional surname, Villaviciosa.

This wretched wanderer by night had a selection of documents in his inside pocket. Some were addressed to Tristan Martinez, with or without the Villaviciosa, and some to Tristano Martini. Among them was an autograph letter with no date, directed to the chief constable of the town. It stated simply :—

“I wish to pay all my debts to my creditors and to society in the only possible way.

“Signed : *Tristan Martinez* (pseudonym of Tristano Martini, son of etc., etc.)”

Nevertheless, this man who was walking up and down with the letter in his pocket had always taken a healthy and normal enjoyment in life. He had shewn it by squeezing it of all the pleasures and delights he could ; and exercised all his intelligence, which was quite limited except in so far as cunning was concerned, towards attaining that end. At that moment, although he fully intended his soul and body to stay together as long as possible, he realised that he could do away with his real name Tristano Martini and his false name Tristan Martinez just by taking a reasonable amount of care ; and he, the bearer of these two names, would get off unharmed.

So every night for a fortnight he had wandered up and down on the river bank, seeking not suicide but a suicide.

First of all he had thought of committing a kind of symbolic suicide, that is to say, he would have left an old hat and coat on the railing, with various documents about himself in the pockets ; then he would have taken the train and gone far away from that town and that country. But the question was,

Would the police and would his creditors be satisfied with finding just an old coat and a felt hat ? They would simply have to find his dead body before they would finally relinquish their claims ; but he did not feel in the least inclined to let them have his dead body. And in our present bureaucratic state of society it is extremely difficult to get certified dead if one isn't !

Then he had the brilliant idea of letting his creditors find someone else's dead body with his own coat on. Did he mean to commit a crime then against the other person ? Not at all ; Tristan Martinez and Tristano Martini as well had both been sentenced several times, but no one could ever say that this double person had ever harmed a hair of anyone's head. His activities had been confined to extracting money from various people and safes ; his method was always persuasion or, as the term goes, by deceit.

So he was relying on persuasion now. It did not seem impossible to find a man of about his age who had already decided to commit suicide by drowning himself, or to persuade him to leave his own coat behind as a sort of souvenir and take things belonging to Tristano Martini in his trousers pockets rather than his own belongings. A man who was going to commit suicide would not bother about such things. Once the coat had been found on the railings, and the body had been fished out of the water in a state of corruption, Tristan Martinez's inconvenient identity would be completely destroyed and he could start off under a new name, leading a new life and even earning his own living if there was no other alternative.

Up till now Tristano had not been particularly lucky in his search. During the whole fortnight he had only come across one person, a woman he had taken for a man wrapped up in a long cloak, at a distance. She had told him how miserable she was ; and after that she asked him for five lire and did not throw herself in the water after all. He had also followed a youth dressed in black who looked exactly as if he were contemplating suicide ; he was standing by the water, gesticulat-

ing and shaking his fist and then looking round suspiciously to see whether anyone were coming. But when he heard Tristano's first polite remarks he growled at him and threatened to throw *him* into the water if he didn't look out ; Tristano only just got away in time, murmuring apologies as he went. Now he really felt discouraged, which was odd for a man so full of confidence that he had always managed to inspire it in other people. If it had not been an absolute necessity (he was threatened with being arrested) he would have given up his plan for good.

But that evening when he was thoroughly tired after his two hours of waiting and was going to sit down on the balustrade, there suddenly appeared a man from behind a heap of stones that were kept there to mend the road. Tristano's expert eye immediately picked him out as different from all the ordinary peaceful people who went by. At a first glance this man seemed to have all the characteristics one associates with a "suspicious character," though they are difficult enough to describe, but even then it was obvious that he was not bent on any evil deed. His suspicious appearance was toned down by a sort of hesitating manner, whereas at night, evil deeds are usually associated with people of great energy and resolution.

The suspicious character crossed the street ; when he reached the parapet he found himself face to face with Tristano. He did not seem to be particularly pleased at this encounter, because he pulled down his hat even further over his eyes and staggered quickly forward along the path.

Tristano was quite decided not to let him out of his sight, and followed him. The man soon noticed he was being followed and hurried a little. When he got to a place where the railings broke off and there was a little terrace looking out over the river, he turned off on to it, and began climbing up on to the railings. . . .

But as soon as he had put one leg up on to the rather high parapet, Tristano rushed up to him and shouted, politely but eagerly :

"Wait a minute . . . wait a minute !"

If he had been a little more athletic the man would have been able to finish off his dangerous tricks, but his gymnastics were not up to his despair and Tristano managed to clutch him just in time by a bit of his coat.

The stranger was obviously rather offended and got down on to the ground. He turned round and said indignantly :

"Let go !"

"But do listen a moment !"

"I tell you, let go ! What do *you* want ? Do you want to take me to the police station ?"

"No, indeed I don't."

"To the hospital then ? Well . . . I'd much rather go to the *morgue* if you really want to know."

He tried to climb up again and Tristano again held him back, this time by seizing his thin flabby arms. Then the poor man whined pitifully :

"But what have I done to *you* ? Go away if you don't want to see. . . . I'll . . . I'll wait till you've gone if you like."

"I swear I'll let you do anything you like, only do listen to me first."

The man became indignant again :

"Who sent you ? The head ?"

"What head ?"

"The head of the College of Heralds."

"Never heard of him."

"Oh, I know then ; the Minister sent you to explain why he didn't appoint me. . . . Tell him I'd spit in his face. . . ."

"Don't get angry there. I came quite on my own account. I can tell you what I want even without telling you who I am."

"Yes, yes, you're a philanthropist and you want to save me ? Well, it's too late, you ought to have thought of that before, my dear philanthropist. And you ought to have saved my daughter as well. I suppose you're going to bribe me or something ? Hypocrites. . . . But you might tell me though how much you'll offer me. . . ."

"Unfortunately I can't offer you anything. I'm an outcast of society as well ; but still. . . ."

"Nonsense . . . words, words . . . I've had enough of words. I've already thought of all the things you could possibly say to dissuade me. I'm an educated man, you know. Why, I'm a philosopher. Because we lost a lot of money and whatnot, I had to ask the Ministry of Education for a post as curator in a museum and they . . . well, they refused, but I might get a professorship possibly. I was to have been tutor to the little Prince of Medina Sidonia but. . . . I refused. I am not killing myself. I am throwing off this base humanity ; I am above such things. I am Cato."

"I admire your noble sentiments very much. I may add I quite agree with you. But before you do this, I really should like. . . ."

"To prevent me ? Don't go on trying that on me. If you try your strength on me, I'll fight you . . . and we'll both go in together."

"No, thank you. I wanted to ask you a personal favour, that's all. I hope that in spite of all you say about despising humanity, you will do me this one favour as a fellow-sufferer ; I'm an outcast like you."

"Well, I'm surprised at you. I'm not an outcast at all. I am a free spirit and I despise life. I haven't come to this conclusion just for financial reasons."

"So much the better. In that case may I ask you"

"I'm sorry. I can't give you anything. I've left all my belongings at home. Charon will have to row me across without my paying. . . ."

"But that doesn't matter a bit. All I want is your waistcoat. . . ."

The brave philosopher who was ready for death seemed ridiculously but obviously scared at the idea of being alone there with a beggar. But he said nothing. Holding his breath, he carefully took off his old hat and gave it to Tristano, who put it under his arm ; then he took off his jacket and gave that to Tristano too. Tristano looked at it with great satisfaction, and said with conviction :

"There's a hole here."

The suicide said solemnly.:

"But for what I wanted I really didn't need to spoil my best clothes. But you though—you really ought to be ashamed of yourself, committing this violence. . . ."

"Violence? Why, do you take me for a murderer? But I've not threatened you or anything. I thought. . . . I thought you were giving me these things of your own free will."

"Then you aren't a pickpocket?"

Tristano was rather amused at this man's guess; but he had no intention of giving up his booty. He looked lovingly at the poor old patched coat he was holding, and answered rather sadly:

"You're hurting my feelings when you say that; I'm a gentleman. Now just look at this coat—do you think it's fit for you to wear? Why . . . everyone would go and say you had financial trouble—by the way, won't you turn out your trousers pockets? No, there isn't anything; that's all right, thanks—but now I've heard what you have to say. . . ."

"No, you're wrong there. Money only played an absolutely infinitesimal part in my decision. . . ."

"Irrevocable decision?"

"Irrevocable decision. I despise money. . . . It's all very well when the master of a college doesn't reappoint you to your job because he says some young fools of undergraduates threw potatoes after you; or when the minister refuses to give you a post as curator; but a philosopher doesn't desert humanity for those little reasons—humanity needs him. . . . You can tell the world. . . . But I ought to know that a sort of pickpocket like you can't possibly understand why a philosopher should want to commit suicide."

"But I've told you I'm not a pickpocket. Don't you believe me? Well, I'll prove it then. You take off your trousers and your shoes and put on mine instead—they're excellent trousers and American shoes. I would give you my coat only I don't think that's really necessary; I mean one doesn't generally—most people just leave it on the railings here. . . ."

The philosopher, although he must have known humanity

pretty well, seemed rather surprised at this almost posthumous politeness. Tristano explained its apparent obscurity.

"You guessed right when you called me a philanthropist. I really am a philanthropist, only rather a special sort ; I always respect other people's wishes and I actually approve of suicide . . . perhaps one of these days I might. . . . So I don't presume to interfere with your decision ; and I am only trying to do what I can without opposing your wishes."

The philosopher, who was really quite tractable, was easily convinced and began changing trousers with the philanthropist. When they had effected the exchange (which was, except for the circumstances, rather like the exchange of arms between the Homeric heroes) Tristano returned insistently and persuasively to the thoughts that were troubling him :

"And now no one will be able to say it was money troubles made you do it."

"Yes, that's true. I really ought to have thought of it. Would you like to know now why I feel I ought to . . . to go ?" He made a solemn gesture towards the river. "It's a question of honour."

"Just like Martinez," Tristano thought, but he said nothing.

". . . It's rather sad. Listen. When no one wanted me, after the director had shut the door in my face because he said I was a disgrace to his institution, and after the Ministry had told me I hadn't got the necessary qualifications, one day after that I couldn't think of anything to do I went and saw my daughter. Yes, I've got a daughter ; I'm only just over forty but I've got a daughter who's nearly twenty. She is illegitimate because philosophers don't believe in ordinary social ties ; but she is my daughter all the same. I've been so busy with my work, I've never really had much time to bother about her. I hadn't seen her for about two years, in fact. So then I went to see her. . . . Just think ; my daughter's got a young man."

"What—as young as that ?"

"And who do you think he is ? A butcher ; just an ordinary butcher. My daughter's simply disgracing the family. This

disgusting creature who sells raw meat had the cheek to turn me out of his stinking shop, too. My daughter was there too, only she never said a word for her father. . . .”

He said these last words in real desperation ; it was the only thing that rang true in all his discordant story, and it touched the heart of the villain as well.

“You poor thing !”

“So you see I’ve got a good reason for wanting to kill myself. That’s why I’ve chosen this famous river ; I may be washed down to the sea, and then people will know I have not died but only suffered a sea-change into something rich and strange. . . .”

Tristano looked at him full of admiration. He came to the conclusion, however, that the most important part of his plan was already settled and that the philosopher had already said much more than a dying man has any right to say ; so after a moment’s silence he tried to say good-bye.

“Good-bye then. Perhaps one day I shall follow you into the water and tell you *my* story.”

“Good-bye,” said the philosopher, turning slowly towards the river.

Tristano could not make up his mind whether to stay and see the poor creature fulfil his promise or whether his natural horror of death would prevent him watching. He took a step or two backwards and gazed once more at the precious old coat ; then he shut his eyes. . . .

But the philosopher came back again and said solemnly :

“Look here, I really don’t see why I should jump in in my shirt-sleeves. After all, I want to look respectable when they pull me out. Would you mind changing coat and waistcoat as well ?”

Tristano was rather embarrassed, but he saw it was no use insisting on the *custom* of jumping in with one’s arms bare, so with his usual cunning he thought of a way of turning a plan that was just going to fall through into a far better plan. Once he had admitted that the man’s body would be recovered from the water (and statistics proved it was so almost invariably) he realised that it would be a much more convincing

proof of Tristan Martinez's death if the dead body were recovered complete with his clothes and his documents than if just an isolated coat were found on the railings. So he agreed to a complete exchange of clothes. He would like to have changed faces as well although the philosopher's was not much to make a fuss about ; but he was trusting in the corruption and the water to help him there. As the river was very full they would take longer to recover him.

When they were changing clothes, Tristano was careful to take a handful of gold coin out of his own pocket ; really it would be too absurd throwing them away with the philosopher. The philosopher, however, who had been changing his clothes in silence, happened to turn his wide-open mad-looking eyes on to the gold coin. Then he said innocently :

"You ought to give me some. Then people would be quite sure that I didn't do it . . . because of need."

Tristano would like to have argued this point only he felt that dawn was coming on quickly, and so he agreed :

"Here's two napoleons."

"Just as you like . . . two or three. . . ."

"Take three then."

The philosopher took them and looked at them scornfully, but he went on to ask :

"What's the safest pocket ? I mean, if they fell out or anything, the whole effect would be spoilt."

"There's the inside one on the left ; it buttons up."

"Thanks. Now I'll put on the coat. I look rather well in it, don't you think ? And the hat, really. . . ."

"No, certainly not. Whatever use would that be to you ?"

"That's true. Now would you mind going a bit further off. . . . I should hate you to try to stop me at the last moment."

"No, I promise I won't."

"Good-bye then."

"God-bye."

Tristano hurried away from the railings, crossed the road and stopped on the path on the other side. His instinct would

have impelled him to go still further away if only a vague suspicion, quite unfounded, of course, had not held him back ; no, the man was mad, obviously ; he would certainly keep his word. So Tristano shut his eyes again and waited for the splash by which the philosopher was going to pay off all Tristan Martinez's debts.

Considering his state of mind and the cold night air, it was natural enough that the wait should seem long. It was only a few seconds ; but their short flight bore with it innumerable fearful fancies. Now one more second . . . now another . . . and another more terrible than all the others . . . and now . . . The agony of waiting was worse than the horror of death. He felt he must open his eyes even if he were to risk seeing the fatal jump. . . .

Had he done it already ? There was no one on the little terrace. But he had not heard anything. Perhaps the thundering noise of the water had drowned the sound of his fall ; even from where he was he could hear its gentle roar in the distance. He thought he had better go and find out. Before moving, however, he looked up, and he saw, twenty yards away, a dark figure creeping along under the shadow of the wall. Tristano recognised something of himself and a great deal of the philosopher in this dark creeping figure.

"Where are you going ?" he shouted.

The philosopher started, like a guilty cat, and then began to run as fast as ever he could. Tristano tore after him ; but the philosopher with three napoleons in his pocket seemed to have wings to his feet. He reached a turning in the road and then vanished.

Tristano slowed down, realising what a useless affair it all was. He stopped before he reached the turning, resigned to what had happened. He did not even see what good it could do if he looked for the man's address in the pockets of his disgusting old coat.

The coat was so old and torn, and Tristano's face was so gloomy, that before he had time to go back and change he found himself arrested as a vagrant.

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